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THE CONWAYS.

BY
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30130 W¹
BOSTON

LEE AND SHEPARD, PUBLISHERS

10 MILK STREET

1893

THE CONWAYS.

CHAPTER I.

In the sitting-room of a pretty home in a western village, Oakwood, sat a girl of sixteen, reading a letter.

“They will be here at this time to-morrow, mother,” she said, looking up as a sweet-faced lady entered the room ; “and I’m almost as sorry as glad.”

“Why so ? I should think you would be delighted to have Rob and Zana with you for a few weeks.”

“So I should if this place were not so dead. We have no amusements here, you know, and they have lived where there is always something going on. Sometimes I have felt as if I should fly when I have read their letters telling of their good times. I hate to live in a place like this, mother ! Pretty soon I’ll be old and can’t have a good time, and then what shall I have to look back to ? I feel just as if I were wasting valuable time.”

“Poor little girl !” said the mother, stroking the soft brown hair. “I think, at your age, I should

have felt just as you do. I must talk to father and——”

“Not send me away, mammy dear!” was the quick reply. “I couldn’t have a good time away from you. I’d rather stay here until I’m a dried-up old woman with all the fun squeezed out of me, than to go away from you.”

“She’s mother’s baby yet!” said the mother softly, drawing the girl, who was nearly as tall as herself, to a seat on her knee. “You can’t think how happy you make me, Gracie dear,” she continued. “I have been selfish not to have thought more of your pleasure.”

“Don’t talk that way, little mother. There isn’t another mother in the world half so perfect as you are.”

“You bet there isn’t!” exclaimed a boyish voice, and a tall, merry-faced, curly-haired boy rushed into the room, and pulled his sister from her seat on the mother’s knee.

“Get up, Grace,” he commanded. “Aren’t you ashamed to tire mother out in that way? I want to sit here myself!”

He seated himself on his mother’s knee, and held his feet up that she might more fully realize his presence, he told her; but in less than a second he sprang up again.

“Ouch!” he exclaimed, “’tisn’t fair to use pins, mother!”

“’Tisn’t fair for an overgrown boy of eighteen to bear his whole weight on his poor old mother’s knee,” she retorted, laughing.

"Oh, Ned!" exclaimed Grace, "they're coming to-morrow."

"Who?"

"Just as if you'd forgotten! Why, Zana and Rob, to be sure."

"Well, can't you let them come?" asked Ned.

"I want them to come, of course; but what are we going to do with them?"

"I don't know, I'm sure! Couldn't we put them on ice?"

"Now, Ned, please be good!"

"Well, then, we might roll them up in waxed paper and lay them away where the rats couldn't get them?"

"Ned, you're dreadfully provoking! You don't try to help me out, at all; and they're to be your guests as well as mine."

"You don't explain yourself properly," protested Ned. "How should I know what you want to do with them?"

"I want to entertain them——"

"Oh, is that all! Send them out to help me chop wood."

"—And you know as well as I do that this is the deadliest place that ever lived!" exclaimed Grace, now thoroughly exasperated.

"Oh, the deadliest place that ever lived!" Ned fell to the floor, where he lay stretched at full length.

"Fan me, mother; I'm faint!"

He gasped for breath, and kept his eyes closed for the space of three seconds, then he was suddenly roused by a dash of cold water in his face.

“Sure cure for fainting!” exclaimed Grace, disappearing quickly through the door, and rushing upstairs two steps at a bound with Ned close behind her. She succeeded in reaching her own room and bolting the door before he could catch her, then, for a little while, quiet reigned in the home of the Conways.

For some time after the children had left her, Mrs. Conway sat lost in thought, from which she was aroused by the coming of her husband.

“Grace is right,” she said, looking up as he bent over her. “Life here must be very dull to an active young girl.”

“Now what?” asked the husband quizzically. “Remember, you haven’t favored me with the first part of the thought.”

“Grace made a complaint which set me to thinking,” she said, then repeated the conversation already recorded.

“I have been so intent on bringing her up to be a companion for myself,” she continued, “and so happy to have her always near me, that I never stopped to consider whether she were content or not.”

“She certainly does not appear unhappy,” replied Mr. Conway. “No one would imagine it to have heard her just now.”

“I like to have her romp,” answered Mrs. Conway, laughing. “I want her to enjoy all sorts of healthy fun; it is the unhealthy fun I dread. When I think of the ways in which the modern society girl seeks amusement, the dances and card parties——”

"Gracie is not old enough for such things anyhow," interposed the father, quickly.

"She is sixteen, and already longing for such amusements as other young people have. I'm afraid if I don't provide something she will be tempted to look elsewhere for it; and Ned is in no less danger."

"Well, what do you propose to do—invite them in and entertain them with cards and dancing?"

"I believe I would do so rather than have my children go away from home to learn such things," answered the mother with a smile. "I'm going to set my wits to work first, however, to see if I cannot find some more innocent amusement for them. Will you help?"

"If I can, but I fear that I shall be of little use."

"You may be of great use from a financial standpoint."

Mr. Conway clutched his pocket-book, in mock dismay, and raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"It would cost a great deal were we to introduce our daughter into fashionable society," said Mrs. Conway. "I'll endeavor to make my experiment cost less than that would."

"All right, then; I'll stand by you; only you must not bankrupt me."

The conversation was interrupted by a violent knocking on the hall door, which sounded as if half a dozen pairs of fists were at work there.

"Hello, there!" shouted Ned, opening the door so suddenly that the two young people outside nearly fell at full length on the hall floor.

“What are you here for, at this time of day?” he asked hospitably.

“Thought we’d surprise you!” was the laughing reply. “We wrote to you to expect us to-morrow, just for the fun of the thing. Where is Grace?”

“I treed her just now!”

“You what! Oh, here she is.”

“Mercy, Ned!” exclaimed Grace, “why didn’t you invite them in?”

“Trying to make up my mind whether we’d better let them in before to-morrow,” was Ned’s saucy reply, as he dexterously slipped his hand between Zana’s and Grace’s lips when they undertook to kiss each other, then unceremoniously helped Rob through the door by his coat collar.

“Ned is just as mean as ever, isn’t he?” asked Zana.

“Every bit!” answered Grace, with a look which showed plainly that she considered her brother very nearly perfect.

“Ned, dear!” expostulated Mrs. Conway, who had come into the hall just in time to see Ned dragging his guest over the threshold, “you should not be so rough. What will Rob think of you?”

“I think he’s glad to see me,” replied Rob, shaking hands with Mrs. Conway. “Boys don’t have to kiss each other every time they meet, as girls do. They have other ways of showing their delight.”

“More emphatic, but quite as soulful,” added Ned, and the two boys laughed so heartily that Mrs. Conway was sure there must be a very good joke

somewhere, and quite sorry that she was too old to appreciate it.

"Well," she said, "since you seem to understand Ned's welcome, I don't know as I should complain of it. Although I have made the subject 'boys' a study for eighteen years," putting her hand on her son's shoulder, "I must confess they are something of a puzzle to me yet."

"What a nice mother you have!" exclaimed Rob, a few minutes later, when the two boys were left to themselves.

"I wouldn't trade her for all the other mothers in the world," answered Ned. "She's lots of fun, too."

"Is she? I thought she didn't look awfully horrified at the way we came in. We are dying for fun, Ned, and we let ourselves loose the minute we stepped off the cars."

"Dying for fun!" exclaimed Ned. "Why, I should think you'd be tired of it, if one might judge by your letters."

"Oh, that wasn't fun! We went to theatres and young people's parties, and dancing-school, and—and everything else that's silly; but we didn't have one bit of real fun, such as we used to have when we all visited grandpa on the farm. Oh, Ned! do you remember our barge?"

"And when we rode a race on the oxen!" exclaimed Ned. "That was the worst ride I ever took."

"You landed in the pig-pen, if I remember correctly," said Rob, choking with laughter.

"Oh, that pig! What a time we had trying to keep him in the pen!"

"How mad the girls got because we tumbled him in head first. Do you remember when we tied a string from his tail to his ears——"

"—And you held the girls while I dragged an ear of corn in front of him——"

"—And he'd turn a somersault every time he put his head down to get it——"

"—And the girls! didn't they struggle! They thought we were hurting the pig."

As the boys continued comparing notes of one summer, four years ago, when the cousins visited together at the home of Grandpa Conway, they laughed so heartily at every fresh recollection that Mrs. Conway, who was at work in an adjoining room, laughed softly to herself in sympathy.

All young people fell in love with Mrs. Conway, "because," they said, "she never forgot that she was young, once, and wanted to have a good time."

"Mother knows just how girls feel about things," said Grace, as she helped Zana lay aside her wraps in her own room. Zana had been asking if Aunt Mary would think Rob and herself "perfectly awful."

"Ned and I act ten times worse every day," answered Grace, "and mamma only laughs. She couldn't scold, you see, for she plays too. She's as good as a girl any day."

"Oh, dear! you ought to be perfectly happy, Grace. You can't imagine what it is to have an aunt who goes into hysterics over everything, and

a mother who scolds and complains all the time."

"You poor dear!" said Grace, "it must be dreadful. I do hope you'll have a good time while you're here; but everything is so dull! I'm afraid you'll nearly die of homesickness."

"I guess not," replied Zana. "I've brought quantities of books, and then we have so much to tell each other that we'll have to talk hours and hours; besides, I want to be out of doors enough to get tanned, or the girls in our set won't believe I've been rusticating at all. Several of them, whose fathers couldn't afford to send them out of the city this summer, shut themselves up in back rooms and pretended that they were away from home."

"How could they do a thing like that!" exclaimed Grace.

"They did. I wouldn't, and I was awfully mad when mamma and auntie went to the sea-shore, and left me at home."

"I should think you would have been glad to have your mother go, even if you couldn't," said Grace.

"There was no more reason why she should go than why I should," was the reply. "She didn't go into society any more during the winter, and was no more nearly worn out. I made such a fuss, however, that papa promised to let me spend the fall months with you, then I was perfectly satisfied."

"Put in an appearance, girls!" shouted Ned, from the foot of the stairs; "that is, if you care to go with us."

"Where are you going?" asked Grace.

"To the Holbrook farm for plums, and we start in three minutes."

"So do we!" answered Grace. "Hurry, Zana! Put on the oldest dress you have, for plum stains are hard to remove."

"My trunk has not arrived, and I've only a tea-gown in my valise."

"Nice one?"

"A beauty. Silk."

"It won't do. Here, put on this."

"Oh, Grace, it's too short! I'd look like a fright. I'm going to wear what I have on."

"Come, girls!" called Ned from the street.

Very soon the four young people were riding through the little village, and out into the beautiful country, which was just changing its dress of green for a brighter one of red and yellow and brown.

"Did you have a pleasant time, children?" asked Mrs. Conway, a few hours later, when the young people flocked into the dining-room.

"Prime!" answered the boys.

"I'm afraid Zana didn't," said Grace. "She can't stand romping as well as I can."

"I'm tired to death!" wailed Zana, throwing herself on the dining-room lounge; "and my pretty travelling dress is completely ruined."

"Why did you wear it?" asked Ned, bluntly.

"It was all I had here. Besides, how should I know what was to happen? If I'd known that you boys were going to act as you did, I should have stayed at home."

"That's what you'd better do next time, Zana, unless you can dress for the occasion," replied Rob.

"What did the boys do, dear?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"Why, they pelted us with plums," began Zana, laughing at the recollection in spite of herself, "and they put me up on the branch of a tree, where I was so frightened I thought I'd drop, and—and—"

"And they rolled her up tight in the lap-robe," interrupted Grace, "and pinned it close, then stood her up and left her. She couldn't move! I never saw anything so funny in all my life!"

Grace and the boys laughed heartily at the recollection, and Zana could not keep her face straight, though she tried to.

"Why did you not go to her assistance, Grace?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"I didn't see what they were doing, just at first. I was up in the branches of a splendid plum tree, trying to shake down the plums—"

"Grace climbs just like a boy," complained Zana.

"But I hurried down as fast as I could," continued Grace.

"And when you were down what did you do? Please explain!" said Rob.

"Yes," chimed in Ned. "What did you do, ma'am?"

"Well," confessed Grace, "I didn't do much but stand still and laugh. I couldn't, Zana," apologetically, "for the boys had you safe, and were ready

to give their whole attention to me. Besides, you did look so funny standing like—like——”

“—A hitching-post,” supplied Rob.

“Zana can’t help herself one bit,” said Ned, half scornfully, “she hasn’t a cent’s worth of muscle. I tell you, Rob, a fellow has to work when he gets into a tussle with Grace.”

“I have never been very strong,” said Zana, plaintively. She thought it was a fine thing to be considered delicate.

“Why didn’t you run when you saw us coming?” demanded Ned. “Instead, she gets all in a heap, just this way, mother, and goes ‘Ow-wow-wow w-o-o-w! P-l-e-a-s-e don’t touch me, boys!’”

There was a general laugh over Ned’s funny mimicry; then Mrs. Conway told the young people to take their places at the table, for tea was ready.

“Can’t I have mine here?” asked Zana. “I’m actually too tired to move.”

“Don’t let her,” said Ned to Rob, before any one else could speak, and that young man acted promptly on the suggestion.

“Arouse yourself, gentle maiden,” he said, lifting Zana to her feet and leading her to the table. “You can’t have folks trotting around to wait on you, here, as you do at home.”

“Very true!” exclaimed Ned. “Rob, you’re a boy of great common-sense. I’m another! Zana needs a course of training, and I’m perfectly willing to assist you.”

“Thank you,” answered Rob, gravely. “I shall not hesitate to call on you.”

"Boys, you are too bad!" exclaimed Grace.
"Zana is really tired."

"If she had got tired working we wouldn't have touched her," said Ned; "but she shouldn't be so silly as to tire herself out at play."

"I'd like to know how I could help it!" retorted Zana.

"You shouldn't get tired so easy," replied Ned, who saw no reason why all girls should not be as physically strong as his sister.

"Have you read the McKinley Bill, Ned," asked Mr. Conway, in order to change the conversation, which was becoming too personal to please him."

"Yes, sir," replied Ned, enthusiastically. "Fine, isn't it?"

"Fine!" echoed Grace, somewhat scornfully, "I don't see anything fine about it."

"Father, I believe Grace is getting to be a Democrat," said Ned. "You ought to put a stop to it."

"I'm not a Democrat," protested Grace. "I'm a Third Party Prohibitionist, and you know it."

"It's the same thing," said Ned, "or nearly so. Father ought to attend to you."

"Grace has as much right to her opinions as you have to yours," said Mr. Conway. "I have no wish to prevent her from standing by the principles which seem nearest right to her."

"How are you going to vote?" asked Grace turning to Rob.

"I don't know," answered Rob, hesitatingly. "I haven't thought much about it yet. There's time enough."

"A boy of eighteen not thought anything about politics!" exclaimed Grace. "Why, I had settled convictions when I was thirteen!"

"And you've changed them every year since!" retorted her brother.

"I changed because I had good reasons for doing so, didn't I, mamma?"

"Mere whim," persisted Ned.

"I don't see how you find time to study such things," said Zana. "I never do, and shouldn't like it if I did. Seems to me there are men enough to attend to politics without our troubling ourselves about them."

"Why, Zana, it's fun!" exclaimed Grace, then turned her attention to the political discussion going on between her father and brother.

When the young people had gone to their rooms for the night, Mr. Conway said gravely:

"Mary, do you think Zana is the right sort of companion for our little girl?"

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"She seems to me to be very frivolous. I can't see what brother William is thinking of."

"Business, I suppose," replied Mrs. Conway; "and his wife is evidently thinking of society. I imagine they do not have much time left for their children. The idea of a girl of sixteen going into society like a grown woman! Do you know, my heart aches for that child!"

"But her influence over Grace; have you thought of that?"

"We must not borrow trouble. Grace will have

to meet such girls after awhile, and I'd rather she began seeing them at home. She may be carried away just at first, but I don't believe our work for the last sixteen years is to be entirely in vain."

CHAPTER II.

“To-morrow is Ned’s birthday,” said Grace on the first morning after the arrival of her cousins. “Don’t say anything about it before him, for I think he has forgotten all about it. We’re going to surprise him, you know.”

“We didn’t know,” replied Rob; “in fact, we don’t know yet.”

“We’re going to have a party, and—hush! there he comes. Yes, Zana,” holding a card-case before Zana’s eyes, “I think that is very well done, don’t you?”

“Oh, say it is beautiful!” exclaimed Ned, dramatically, “call it perfectly wonderful, immense, gorgeous, anything to have it over with. There is one thing you have yet to learn, my child,” he added, patting Zana’s cheek in a patronizing way, as he passed her to throw himself at full-length on the lounge, “and that is this: You must praise everything Grace does. You’ll have to do it sooner or later, and the quicker you do it the quicker you’ll get through with a disagreeable job, and—Oh, Grace, I beg!”

“You’ll have to beg very humbly this time, young man,” answered Grace, who had seated herself on her brother’s chest and was holding firmly to both

of his ears. "It isn't often that I get a chance like this, my dear, and I mean to improve it. Are you obliged to praise everything I do?" giving his ears a little jerk.

"Ouch! No! Good gracious, no!"

"You never praise anything unless you think it deserves praise?"

"Never, so help me George Washington!"

"But everything I do deserves praise?"

"Everything! Don't pull so!"

"Is it a disagreeable job to praise me?"

"It's stacks of fun!" with a groan.

"Don't you dare to groan! Now say, 'To praise you is one of the pleasantest duties of my life.'"

"To praise me—Oh no, I'll say it right! To praise you is one of the pleasantest duties of my life."

"All right, you may get up, now; but first promise not to touch me for half an hour."

Ned promised, and Grace allowed him to get up.

"You have a good chance, now; pay her back," suggested Rob.

"No, I won't break my promise even in play," answered Ned. "She got the advantage this time, and it's all right. Next time I'll be looking out."

"Why didn't you shake her off?" inquired Rob.

"Shake her off!" exclaimed Ned. "You've never had a trial of strength with Grace, or you'd know it isn't so easy. Why, she's nearly as strong as I am. Besides, my hands were under my back."

"I think it is awful for a girl to be so strong," said Zana, languidly.

"I think it is fine!" answered Grace. "I don't see why I shouldn't be strong, as well as Ned. I don't like girls who are always complaining."

"Nor I," replied Rob; "but most of them seem to ache somewhere all the time, and are ready to break into pieces if they are touched."

"Girls were not meant to be as strong as boys," said Zana, "and no one likes a mannish girl. Many and many a time I've heard gentlemen, yes and ladies too, laugh about mannish girls. It's well enough to be strong out here in the country where no one knows anything about it, and a strong girl can have lots more fun; but in society—goodness, Grace! I should be mortified to death to have my friends know how strong you are! Don't you remember Miss Swaim, Rob?"

"Remember her!" Rob and Zana laughed heartily. "Once seen, never forgotten!" he continued. "She believed in Woman Suffrage, and when she was on the street she actually looked more like a man than a woman. Once she horse-whipped a man, and—Oh dear! I can't begin to tell all the awful things she has done."

"Grace," called Mrs. Conway from the kitchen, "there is work to be done this morning; had you forgotten?"

"Very nearly," replied Grace, running to the kitchen, glad to be where she could think it all over, alone.

Grace had always been very proud of her good health, and often boasted that she had never been sick in bed a day in her life; now she almost wished

that her cheeks were a little paler, and that she hadn't used quite so much strength in holding her brother on the lounge. She certainly did not want to be laughed at by ladies and gentlemen.

"Mother has always liked to have me well and strong," she said afterwards, when talking it over again with Zana.

"Of course," was the reply. "Mothers are always afraid their children are going to die, you know; and they'd rather have them as strong and awkward as elephants than to lose them. That is, some mothers would. I'm not so sure about my mother, but I know yours would feel that way about it. You've got an awfully nice mother, Grace, but she isn't the least bit stylish. You couldn't depend on her judgment at all if you wanted to go into society, because she is really behind the times."

"I don't care if she is," answered Grace, hotly, "I wouldn't change her for all the other mothers in the world."

"Neither would I if I had her," confessed Zana, so earnestly that peace was established between the cousins at once.

"Now we are alone," said Grace, "I must tell you what we are going to do to-morrow. I do hope Ned will be surprised for once; he is the worst boy I ever saw about finding out things we try to keep secret. This time he seems to have forgotten what time of the month it is."

"It is so nice to remember the birthdays," said Zana. "We never do at our house. It would be so expensive."

“Can’t you have inexpensive entertainments?”

“Oh, no! Why, folks would say that we were on the road to the poorhouse. We have to entertain all our set, when we entertain at all, and so we only give a ball once a year, and have one or two receptions, and a dinner or two—just as little as we can get along with. When we do entertain, we invite everybody who has invited us, and get through with our society obligations in a wholesale manner.”

“Well,” said Grace, “I shouldn’t like that at all. We invite people because we like to have them come, not because they have invited us; and we have something going on in honor of every birthday and all the other holidays.”

“How can your father afford so many entertainments?”

“They don’t cost much.”

“Oh, that’s it!” Zana’s lip curled quite disdainfully.

“We have real good times,” faltered Grace.

“Oh, I suppose so! We are not expected to appear in full dress, then?”

“I shall wear my garnet cashmere.”

“And I?”

“The dress you have on will be plenty good enough.”

“I shouldn’t care to appear in any such style! I shall wear my blue silk, I think.”

An hour later, Grace found her way to her mother’s bedroom.

“Do you know, mother,” she said, “I almost

wish we were not going to have the party to-morrow night."

"What, not notice Ned's birthday! Why, Grace?"

"I'm sure Rob and Zana will think it very stupid, and—and you know, mother, they do things very differently."

"Then they'll enjoy our way of doing things all the more. Don't worry, pet; I'm sure we shall all have a very nice time."

"I hope so." Grace smiled faintly. "Mother, I suppose you'll think I'm silly, but sometimes I wish I could have good times in the way Zana does. I've heard other girls tell about them, and—well, ours seem so tame in comparison!"

Mrs. Conway was silent, and there was a thoughtful look in her dark eyes, as she gently stroked her daughter's hair.

"Mamma dear, forgive me!" Grace threw her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her. "I'm just as ungrateful and horrid as any one can be. You do everything for me, and still I complain, and I'm not worth a second thought. Please forget it, mother, and I'll promise to be more contented and unselfish."

"There is nothing to forgive, sweetheart. Mother understands you perfectly."

Long after Grace had left the room, the mother sat thinking, trying to decide what was best for her to do.

The next day passed slowly to Grace, and Zana and Rob, although there was plenty of work for

them to do. Mr. Conway had sent Ned to the city to get a book of reference which he suddenly and opportunely found himself in need of, and which he knew could not be found in the town library.

“Ned cannot get back until the guests have arrived,” said Grace, gleefully. “Papa, you always think of the very best way of doing things. I couldn’t imagine how we were going to get rid of him.”

“He’ll be at home at half-past eight, won’t he?” asked Zana.

“Yes, but I’ve invited the guests to be here at eight.”

“At eight! why, you must keep children’s hours!” Again there was the half-scornful tone in Zana’s voice which made Grace so uncomfortable.

At half-past eight o’clock, that evening, Ned was heard whistling merrily as he came up the walk, and the gay party of young folks gathered in the large hall, and were very quiet. He threw the door open wide, and immediately a dozen girlish hands seized and held him fast, while the rest of the feminine portion of the party proceeded to give him his birthday whipping.

“Eighteen blows,” called Grace, setting the rest a fine example, “and a fierce one to grow on, and a fiercer yet to be a good boy on!”

“Hold on, there!” shouted Ned, struggling to free himself; “you ought to be ashamed! Why didn’t you give a fellow warning? It isn’t fair to strike like snakes in the grass.”

"He calls us snakes, girls!" said Grace. "Now we'll not show him the least mercy."

"Boys," panted Ned, "can't you help a fellow?"

"We're pledged not to interfere," said one.

"It's your birthday, you know," added another.

"You have my sympathy, old fellow," said Rob, laughing; "but I don't dare to interfere."

Ned was finally released, when he hurried to his room to make himself presentable.

"What if he should be angry and refuse to come down again!" said Zana.

"Angry!" Grace laughed. "Fancy Ned getting angry over a joke! I shouldn't have a very good opinion of him if he did."

"Don't you ever get angry over a joke?" asked Rob.

"No, sir, I don't. Father and mother wouldn't allow me to be so silly if I wanted to be. They say we might as well learn self-control in that way as any other."

At that moment Ned came into the room, with a broad smile on his pleasant face, although he was doing his best to look stern.

"Gentlemen," he said, bowing low to the boys, "I am delighted to see you here to-night. It quite reconciles me to my—my—"

"—aged state," suggested Zana. Ned bowed assent.

"Like old cheese?" asked Grace, but he paid no attention.

"I really wish," he continued, "that I could say

the same respecting those—those females ! ” casting a scornful look towards the girls.

“ Ned, I’m ashamed of you ! ” exclaimed Grace, indignantly.

“ I knew I could make Grace flash fire ! ” said Ned, laughing gleefully. “ Nothing makes her so angry as to have anyone call a woman a female.”

“ Now we will choose partners for supper,” announced Grace, taking two baskets from the mantel.

“ Choose partners for supper ! ” repeated Rob. “ Why, Grace, of what are you thinking ? It isn’t half-past nine o’clock yet.”

“ Supper will be ready by the time we have found our partners,” replied Grace. “ Here, Ned,” handing one of the baskets to her brother, “ please pass this to all the girls, and have each select one leaf from it. I’ll attend to the boys.”

“ Is it safe for me to go near the girls ? ”

“ Quite safe. I’ll answer for them.”

The baskets contained leaves cut from green paper-cambric. Natural leaves had been used for patterns, and there were two of each kind, one in the basket which was passed to the girls, one in that passed to the boys. As soon as a boy had selected a leaf, he started in search of the girl who had drawn the mate to it, for he was to be her escort to supper.

Such a merry time as they had ! So many of the leaves were exactly alike in shape, and were distinguished apart only by the veining which was done in a different shade of thread, and so many leaves were exactly alike as to veining, but slightly differ-

ent in shape, that the young people became quite confused before they found the one who was to be their companion at supper, and the last boy to find the lady whom he was to escort, had only just succeeded when the tea-bell called them into the dining-room.

Both dining-room and table were prettily decorated with green leaves and a few autumn flowers. At each plate was a leaf cut from a sheet of plain white cardboard, to which a tiny lead pencil was tied by a narrow ribbon. Mr. and Mrs. Conway acted as waiters. They wore tall white paper caps, decorated with green leaves, and they performed their duties so faithfully, that Ned promised them each a bright red testimonial just as soon as he could afford to buy cardboard of which to make them.

"What are these for?" asked one of the guests, holding up his cardboard leaf.

"You must each write a rhyme on your leaf, containing its name," explained Grace. "The one who writes the best rhyme will get a prize, and so will he who writes the poorest."

"She, you mean," corrected Ned.

"No, HE!" with emphasis. "SHE will get the head prize."

"I can't write a rhyme——" began Zana.

"No such word as 'can't' allowed here," interrupted Grace. "Everyone must try. The names of the writers will not be read, except of the two who receive the most votes for the prizes."

"How do we know what leaf to write about?" asked Rob. "I am no botanist."

"You have to guess ; there's where the fun comes in."

"The young people were very busy with their pencils for a few minutes, then Mrs. Conway gathered up the leaves, and began reading the verses aloud.

"Oh, maple leaf, it seems to me
A prettier sight I ne'er did see
Than you, when hanging on yon tree,
Wherein the maple sugar be."

"Ned wrote that, I know !" exclaimed Zana. "It sounds just like him."

"But the touching ode to the maple leaf is written on an oak leaf," said Mrs. Conway, "So this poem cannot take first prize." And one of the guests groaned so dismally that there was no further doubt about the author.

"Here in my hand, what do I see ?
An ivy leaf, it seems to me ;
But if you don't agree with me
Then you may name the tree."

The verse was no sooner read than Rob, who prided himself on his ability as a rhymester, instantly added : "Oh, Zana, Zana, can't you see, that that leaf came from a hickory tree ?" and Zana promptly responded :

"Oh, Rob, how very mean you be, to expose the ignorance of me."

"She's even with you, Rob !" exclaimed Grace.
"Girls, clap your hands for Zana !"

The girls obeyed most willingly, and the boys hissed, while Mr. and Mrs. Conway looked on, and laughed.

There was quite an exciting time when votes were taken on the verses. Ned received the foot prize—a Japanese doll, which he tended carefully during the rest of the evening. His rhyme was written on a poplar leaf, and read as follows :

“ This leaf is known by the name of poplar
But what else to say I don’t know,
No more than our old gobbler.”

He was forced to endure a great deal of ridicule on account of that “poetry ;” even Rob, who promised to stand by him, joining in the general laugh. When the votes had been taken, and Ned’s name announced as the one signed to that wretched attempt, Grace quietly left her seat, dampened a napkin with cologne, and pinned it around his head.

“ Thanks, awfully ! ” he said, with great composure ; “ that relieves me wonderfully.”

The verse which was voted best, read as follows :

“ When thou the fairest leaf wouldest find,
Go out into the clearing,
And when a vivid, flame-like branch
Thou seemest to be nearing,
Make haste ! a tiny maple tree
Touched by Jack Frost awaiteth thee.”

“ I know who wrote that,” said Grace, her voice as full of pride as if she had been the author herself, looking lovingly towards her best girl friend.

Yes, Helen Dayne was the author, and she blushed prettily as she arose to receive the prize—a beautiful rosebush in full bloom.

“Doesn’t her mother do your mother’s washing?” whispered Zana.

“She does,” answered Grace, in a way that convinced Zana that she would be wise not to pursue that subject just at present, but she resolved to give Grace a little good advice as soon as a suitable opportunity presented itself.

When the rhymes had all been read, nuts, candy and fruit were set before the young people, and then Mr. Conway appeared with a basket full of packages.

“Your majesty,” he said, bowing low before Ned, as he placed the basket beside his plate, “your most humble and obedient servant has the honor of presenting the birthday gifts which your kind friends have provided.”

“My most humble and obedient servant deserves a leather medal as big as the side of a barn,” said Ned, flushing with pleasure. “Where shall I begin?” he asked, taking up the first package, untying the string, and removing the outer wrapping.

“You must untie every knot,” said Zana.

Ned untied several knots, and removed several layers of paper, until the package had become much smaller, but was still nicely done up in paper, and tied securely.

“See here!” he finally exclaimed; “how much longer is this going to last! I refuse to untie another knot.”

"Cut it, then," said Grace. "You've done very well!"

Ned removed several more coverings, and was finally rewarded for his perseverance with a very nice silk handkerchief, bearing a tag, on which was written: "With love, from sister Grace."

Next came a five-dollar gold piece from father, concealed in a hollow biscuit, and a pair of slippers from mother, in each of which was concealed a nice linen handkerchief. There were, besides, gloves, books, neckties, writing materials, and all sorts of things dear to the heart of a boy. Nearly all his friends had remembered him in some way, and everyone realized more than ever before how great a favorite the fun-loving boy was among the young people.

When the last parcel was opened, Ned was told that he must make a speech.

"Oh, I beg!" he exclaimed, looking really distressed. "Take your gifts back again! Much as I like them, and want to keep them, I can't consent to pay so high a price as that would be."

"They are given; we can't take them back," replied one of the boys, decidedly, and the rest of the young people applauded.

"Speech! Speech! Speech!" they called.

"Seems to me you are asking a little too much of Ned," said Helen.

Ned was on his feet in an instant. He did not want anyone, especially a girl, to intercede in his behalf. He had always declared that he was quite capable of fighting his own battles, and often said

that if he could not succeed alone, he would prefer being beaten.

"What shall I speechify about?" he asked.
"Give me a subject. I can talk on one subject as well as another."

"Birthdays."

"Girls."

"What you like to do best."

"Surprise parties."

"Your grandmother."

"Your sweetheart."

"Hold on!" cried Ned, ringing the tea-bell to attract attention; "you have given me as many subjects as I can do justice to in one evening."

"Great Scott!" murmured Rob; "is he going to talk on all of them?"

"He is!" calmly responded Ned, then bowing low to his parents and the guests, he began:

"Ladies and gentlemen, and most honored and illustrious waiters! We have met here to-night to celebrate one of the greatest events which our country has known since the birth of George Washington, namely: the birth of Edwin W. Conway, Esquire, M. D., A. B., Ph. D., etc., etc."

"Hear! Hear!" cried a voice at the other end of the table.

"No interrupting the speaker!" said Rob, pounding on the table with his nut-cracker.

"The noble personage in question," continued Ned, "came into this world a boy, for which he has ever been very grateful. Had he belonged to the species called girl, he would immediately have held his

breath until he became a pale-blue corpse. (Hisses from the girls.) As he has tripped lightly through his eighteen years of life, making the world brighter and more beautiful every day he lives in it, (Deep groans from the girls. Cries of 'that's so' from the boys), he has shown a deep and abiding love for so many worthy occupations, all of which would be honored and adorned by his presence in their ranks, that it is difficult to say which one will proudly claim him in the future, and——"

"Settle him in the high position of janitor," interrupted Grace.

"Silence in the court-room!" commanded Rob.
"Orator, proceed."

"In his lofty ambition," continued Ned, after consulting his memorandum to see what came next on the list of subjects given him, "he has no time for surprise parties——"

"If he has for slang," said Grace, softly.

"—for he is devoted to his grandmother; as for his mother, she is his only sweetheart, always has been, and always will be."

"I think I shall hold you to that declaration, my son," said Mrs. Conway, as Ned sat down amid enthusiastic applause.

The young folks then adjourned to the sitting-room where a blackboard had been hung against the wall. Grace asked the guests to seat themselves in couples as they were divided in the dining-room, then she handed a little palette cut from cardboard to each couple. Ned was then requested to take his place at the blackboard. Grace held a long strip

of paper in her hand on which was written the names of as many animals and insects as there were persons present. She allowed Ned to read the first one, taking care that no one else saw the word, and he then proceeded to make as good a picture of the animal named as he could, inside of five minutes. The rest of the guests wrote on their palettes the name of the animal they supposed he was trying to draw. He was endeavoring to make a picture of a monkey, but as he was about as much of an artist as poet, all sorts of guesses, including "horse" and "rat" were written on the palettes. Every guest was obliged to draw one picture, and then Grace read from her list the names of the animal as given to each "artist," and each one drew a line through the wrong guess on his palette. Prizes were provided for the couple making the most correct guesses, also to the couple making the fewest.

When the prizes were awarded the guests were astonished to learn that it was nearly midnight, and at once began to make preparations to go home, after wishing that Ned would have a birthday twice a year, and a party on every birthday !

That night, when Grace and Zana were undressing, Grace was surprised and delighted to hear her cousin say :

"Do you know, Grace, I never had so much fun in one evening in all my life. And how nicely everything passed off!"

"I'm so glad, Zana," answered Grace. "I feared you would find it very tiresome, after your grand parties at home."

“Our parties are grander, and they cost ten times as much, but are not half the fun. Mamma and I get so tired and worried that we couldn’t have a good time, even if we felt sure that none of our guests were laughing at us about something. I wish we could have parties like yours, but of course it would never do at all.”

“Why not?”

“Because nobody else does.”

“That seems like a funny reason.”

“You would understand it if you understood society ways.”

CHAPTER III.

“WHAT a weather-beaten parasol!” exclaimed Zana, the next morning, as the girls were starting for a walk. “Don’t carry that old thing, Grace; haven’t you a better one?”

“I am sorry to say I haven’t,” replied Grace, looking annoyed; then, happening to notice her mother’s eyes fixed on her face, the annoyance passed off, and she added with a laugh. “It isn’t a beauty, but, you see, I made up my mind early in the spring not to buy a new one, and I’m determined to stick to my resolution.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Zana. “I was very rude. I wouldn’t have spoken if I’d dreamed——”

“That I was so poverty-stricken,” supplied Grace, with a good-natured laugh. “There’s no harm done, I’m sure. Good-bye, mamma; if we fail to return in due time, you may know we have decided to become tramps.”

“Good-bye, girls; have as good a time as you can.”

When the girls had left the house, Zana began abruptly:

“Grace, I thought you had a monthly allowance to spend just as you pleased.”

“To spend as I think best,” corrected Grace. “I wish I could have money to spend as I please.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Why, papa gives Ned and me just what he thinks he can afford to spend on us, and he expects us to make it cover all our expenses except our board.”

“If it didn’t, wouldn’t he give you more?”

“I shouldn’t like to ask him to, when I know he has already given me as much as he can afford. It would be unfair to ask him to do more than that. Sometimes I borrow of him, when I need a great many things all at once; but he doesn’t really like to have me do that. He says I should know beforehand that extra shopping is to be done, and provide for it.”

“He certainly ought to give you enough to enable you to dress decently. You can get a very good parasol for three dollars.”

“He does give me enough,” answered Grace, quickly; “but sometimes I prefer to spend it for something besides clothes. This spring I had to make a choice between a parasol and something else, and concluded to make my old parasol do.”

“What could be a nicer way to spend money than for pretty clothes? I think it is every girl’s duty to dress as nicely as she can,” said Zana, with great decision.

Grace changed the subject. She did not care to tell that the money she might have spent for a new parasol had paid for drawing-lessons for her dearest friend, Helen Dayne. Helen did not know it herself, and Grace was in such constant fear that she would find it out that she guarded her secret with the greatest care.

When the new teacher announced his intention of starting a private class in drawing, the young people of most of the well-to-do families of Oakwood hastened to join it. The price was considered very low—only three dollars for twelve lessons—but Helen knew that it was more than her mother could afford to pay, and so she did not mention it to her. How great was her longing to join the class, no one knew, but someone guessed.

“It is a perfect shame, mother!” Grace had said, when talking it over with her mother. “There isn’t a pupil in our school who has as much talent for drawing as Helen.” And then she mentioned her plan for helping her friend.

“How can we manage it, mother, that Helen will not know who pays for her lessons? She is so proud that she would never forgive me if she found out.”

One day Helen received an envelope through the post-office, containing three dollars, with a type-written letter informing her that the money was to be spent in drawing-lessons. It was mailed in a neighboring city, and though Helen and her mother made many guesses, they had never succeeded in learning the name of their unknown friend.

“Let us go around by Helen’s house and get her to go with us,” suggested Grace.

“What for? Can’t you enjoy yourself unless she is along?” answered Zana. “I do believe you like Helen better than you do me.”

“I like you differently. You are my cousin, and one always has a different feeling towards one’s own folks; but Helen is my best girl friend. We’ve been

chums always. We were chums before her father died. They were once the richest family in town, but her father failed in business and died a few days afterward."

" Seems to me Mrs. Dayne might have found something better to do than to take in washing. Has she no relatives ? "

" Yes, but she is too independent to depend on relatives. They owned two houses. The large brick house opposite ours was theirs, then, and also the one they live in now. Mrs. Dayne sold the large house to pay debts, and moved into the smaller one. She did try several ways of earning a living, but she had never learned how to work, and in a little town there isn't much for a woman like her to do."

" Why didn't she go elsewhere ? "

" She had a home here, which she could not sell readily ; besides, she is not fitted to compete with city workwomen. There really seemed nothing better for her to do than what she is doing. Then, you know, our schools are most excellent, and she wishes to educate Helen as well as she can."

" It is too bad ! I think Helen would be quite a nice girl if——"

" Helen is a very nice girl without ifs," interrupted Grace, in a tone of voice that told Zana the task she had set herself would not be an easy one ; but the thought that she was doing only what was for her cousin's good, helped her to go on. Zana was sincere in the belief that Grace ought not to be on intimate terms with one who would be considered her inferior socially. She had been taught from babyhood that

only the fortunate people who were very rich, and could boast a long line of grandfathers, could afford to do as they pleased in such matters.

"Of course Helen is nice," she said ; "but there is no reason why you should have just the same feeling for her now."

"There is no reason why I shouldn't, as I can see," replied Grace, who saw, at once, the drift of Zana's talk. "Helen didn't change when her mother took in washing ; in fact, I think their trouble has made her more lovable."

"But, Grace, that isn't the only thing to be taken into consideration. I suppose there are street boys who are nicer than the boys in our set, in some respects, and perhaps, if I knew them well, I might like them better than many boys I know, but that wouldn't give me an excuse for associating with them."

"It would me," replied Grace, laughing. "If I were obliged to associate with boys, I'd choose the nicest ones I could find, whether they were on the street or in the President's drawing-room, and I wouldn't judge them by their clothes."

"You'll know more than you do now, about some things, Grace, if you ever go into society, but you'll have to change many of your ideas before you will be recognized. Didn't any of the young folks, here, treat Helen differently when——"

"Yes," interrupted Grace, indignantly, "they did, and I've had my opinion of them ever since. Everybody ran after her when she was rich ; some of the girls were positively sickening in their manner, and

they are the ones who do not know her now. I think she must feel greatly relieved ; I know I should."

"I noticed that some of your friends were not particularly cordial the night of the party," said Zana, triumphantly.

"They were my acquaintances," corrected Grace. "My friends are all sensible enough to like anyone who is worth liking."

"I think you can't have many friends, then. Of course, in this little out-of-the-way village, one can do what couldn't be done in the city. I might love our washerwoman to distraction, but if I attempted to associate with her on equal terms I would soon have no one else with whom to associate."

"I wouldn't be dictated to by those who have no right to superintend my affairs," replied Grace, resolutely. "I would be independent enough to choose the companions I wanted most, wherever I lived."

"No, you wouldn't," answered Zana. "You don't know what you are talking about. I wish your mother would let you spend a year with me ; you'd soon see how one-sided your notions are."

"Thanks for the compliment!" Grace laughed, but her cousin could see that she was not pleased.

"That sounded rude, I know," said Zana ; "but you don't have a very high opinion of me, Grace, and I want to make you see that you are judging me by some laws that other folks wouldn't recognize at all. You would like me better if you would try to understand what——"

"Why, Zana, what are you talking about? I love you dearly, and you ought to know it."

"You love me, of course, but you don't quite approve of me. You think I care too much for the opinions of others. Nearly every day you and Ned laugh at Rob and me, because you think we are not independent. That is because you have no idea of anything beyond this village; if you had you would know that a person can't do entirely as he pleases, and would have no right to do so if he could."

Zana spoke with unusual earnestness. She liked Grace better than any other girl she had ever known, and wished to have her good opinion. Although she did not know it, herself, she was a little jealous of Helen. It irritated her to have Grace go to Helen to talk over every matter which the girls considered important, instead of asking her judgment.

"I wonder what I have said or done to make you think that I have so poor an opinion of you?" said Grace. "Why, I have been thinking all the time that you would have a poor opinion of me! Zana, darling," throwing one arm around her cousin's waist, "I just believe you and I are two great geese!"

"So do I," answered Zana, with a happy laugh. "And now that we know it, we ought to understand each other better."

While the girls talked they had been slowly walking towards Mrs. Dayne's home, and now found themselves opposite her gate.

"Shall we go in?" asked Grace.

"As you like," answered Zana, thinking that, after all, she could do as she pleased in this country

town and be in no danger of criticism from her city friends.

Grace walked into the pleasant little sitting-room without knocking, and found no one there; then with the freedom of a privileged acquaintance, she went through the house to the summer kitchen in the rear, where Helen was found at work over a tub of clothes just from the boiler.

“Hello!” said Grace, “I was afraid we’d find you here. We want you to go with us to the Springs; Zana hasn’t seen them yet.”

Helen flushed a little, when she saw Zana, but welcomed her quietly, then went in search of chairs for her guests.

“I must ask you to sit here, girls,” she said, “and excuse me if I work while we talk. Mamma was quite worn out, and I promised to get these clothes out if she would take a nap.”

“Oh, dear! then you can’t go with us,” exclaimed Grace, in a tone of disappointment.

“I’m afraid not; I wish I could.”

“How long will it take you?” glancing at the tub.

“An hour at least. Don’t wait for me; perhaps I can go next time.”

“If one person can do a certain task in one hour, two persons can do the same task in one-half of one hour,” said Grace, rolling up her sleeves, “therefore——”

“No, no, Grace, you mustn’t!” interposed Helen. “It wouldn’t be treating your cousin fairly; besides, I am not sure but it may take longer.”

"If you'll get Zana a rocking-chair, she will wait any length of time," answered Grace.

"And a book, too!" called Zana, as Helen went for the chair.

"What kind of book?" asked Helen.

"Oh, a good short story. I don't want to begin anything and leave it half finished."

"Lend me an apron, please," said Grace, when Helen returned. "Which shall I do, grind or souzle?"

"You may souzle," replied Helen with a laugh, and Grace began to rinse the clothes while Helen turned the wringer.

"I thought we should find them here," said a voice from the back doorway, a few moments later, and Ned and Rob walked into the kitchen.

"When I can't find Grace at home, I always look for her here," said Ned. "Have a seat, Rob; let's make ourselves at home." Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he jumped from the chair, and made a low bow to Helen.

"Good afternoon, Miss Dayne," he said with exaggerated politeness, "I really hope I see you well, madam!"

"Quite well, thank you," answered Helen, "but not at home to callers. Will you oblige me by returning to your own vine and fig-tree?"

"My dear madam, I regret to say that it will not be possible for me to accede to your most flattering request."

"What are you here for, boys?" demanded Grace.

"We heard you say you were going to the Springs," began Rob.

"So concluded to cut across lots and get there first," finished Ned. "You girls make us a great deal of trouble! We waited until we were worn out, then started out to find you."

"We had planned——" began Rob.

"Hush!" exclaimed Ned, putting his hand over Rob's mouth. "Don't tell; it will keep until next time."

"We called for Helen," explained Grace. "We're all going as soon as these clothes are out. Now do go and leave us in peace."

"We should really like to oblige you," said Ned, "but it is utterly impossible. We think of helping you wash. Come on, Rob!"

The girls protested, but in vain. The boys threw off their coats, and were soon turning the wringer, sudsing the clothes, and washing the girls' faces, as if their lives depended on their ability to do a great deal in a little while.

"What's this?" asked Rob, holding a white skirt up to view.

"Don't ask, I beg!" replied Ned. "It belongs to Helen. See her blush! Her face looks uncomfortably hot, Rob; we must cool it for her."

"Certainly!" said Rob, with great cheerfulness.

Helen was held over the tub by one of the boys, while the other squeezed the water from a sheet over her head and face. Grace ran to her assistance, and received a similar punishment for her attempt.

"Look at Zana!" shouted Ned. "She has sat

there laughing at these poor girls for the last ten minutes."

"Such things cannot be allowed," answered Rob, with great solemnity.

Zana jumped from her chair, and started at a run for the front door, but Rob caught her before she had crossed the room.

"Help me, girls! Oh, please help me!" begged Zana.

"I can't," said Helen, "my eyes are full of water."

"The water is running in streams down my back," added Grace, who was trying to wring the moisture from her hair.

Zana screamed and struggled, but the boys were merciless; in less time than it takes to tell it, her brother had carried her to the tub, and Ned was pouring water on her head, and smiling so cheerfully that no one could have failed to see how much satisfaction he was getting from the work.

"Well, I declare!"

The young people looked up quickly to see Mrs. Dayne standing in the doorway. She had been awakened by the unusual commotion in the kitchen, and hastened down to ascertain the cause.

"Afternoonee!" said Ned, who was seldom so surprised as to be speechless. "Ah Wing, me!" pointing to himself. "Heap nicee washee man. Che Pang, he!" pointing to Rob. "He heap nicee too."

Rob bowed with one hand held over his heart, the other over his stomach.

Mrs. Dayne laughed in spite of her attempt to look serious.

"You may be very nice," she said, "but you are not very careful of my floor. How am I ever going to do my work without wetting my feet?"

"You're not going to try, mamma mine," said Helen. "I'll clear up here as soon as my hair stops dripping."

"We'll help," said Ned; "and now, dear madam, let me beg of you to take in the beauties of that picture. It is called 'The Three Graces.'" As he spoke he pointed to the girls, who happened to be standing near together, each busy trying to get her hair dry enough to put up.

"The mermaids, you mean," corrected Rob, and Ned laughed heartily.

"Hear Ned laugh," said Grace in a tone of intense scorn. "One would think Rob had said something witty."

"Didn't you know that when one boy tries to be witty the other is pledged to laugh?" demanded Zana.

"I wonder how they know when the attempt is to be made?" soliloquized Helen.

"When it has been made, you mean," amended Grace.

"Oh dear, what shall I do with my frizzes?" wailed Zana. "Every bit of curl is out of them. I can't go on the street looking like this."

"It's shocking! positively shocking!" exclaimed Rob. "Your fortune would be made if Barnum could see you now. Oh, that a sister of mine should come to this!"

"You never try to understand how I feel about anything," complained Zana, "and you always laugh at me."

"That is because you are so silly, Zana," replied Rob, bluntly. "Why can't you be more like Grace? She isn't worrying because she must go home with her hair combed straight back."

Rob's lecture was interrupted most unexpectedly by Grace and Helen, who had crept up behind him with a wet sheet in their hands in which they enveloped him before he guessed their intention.

"Lock the doors, Zana!" exclaimed Grace. "Quick, before Ned gets in!"

Ned had gone for an armful of wood, at Helen's request, and when he heard Rob calling for help, found himself locked out. He looked into the window, and saw Helen and Zana holding the sheet which pinioned Rob's arms, while Grace bathed his face with quantities of cold water.

"If we'll let you go, now, will you promise not to touch us again to-day!" asked Helen.

"Yes."

"On your honor as a gentleman?"

"On my honor as a gentleman."

"Let's give him his freedom, girls," she said.

"No, no; not yet!" interposed Grace. "You don't know boys as I do, Helen; you have no brother. Rob will get Ned to do what he promised not to."

"That is so," interrupted Zana. "We know from experience. He did so once before,"

"Will you promise not to let Ned touch us?" asked Grace.

"It isn't fair to ask so many questions," replied Rob, resuming his struggles to free himself.

"Ha, ha ! young man ; we've caught you ! Girls, the boy needs another bath !"

The girls prepared to administer more cold water, and Ned tapped on the window-pane.

"Girls !" he called, "if you don't let me in I'll break a window-pane !"

"You don't dare !" retorted Grace.

"Three against one ! shame ! shame !" he said, scornfully.

"We feel best when we are ashamed," answered Helen, cheerfully.

"Promise, Rob ;" said Grace, "if you don't promise soon we'll pour a pailful of water on you. Will you agree not to let Ned touch us ?"

"I suppose I must."

"You promise on your honor as a gentleman ?"

"Yes, on my honor as a gentleman."

Then Rob was released, and the doors unlocked.

"That was pretty tough, old fellow," said Ned.

"Yes," replied Rob, "but I've only promised to let them alone for the rest of the day. To-morrow is before us."

"Oh, the glorious to-morrow !" exclaimed Ned, dramatically.

The young folks went to work in earnest, and soon the washing was on the line, and the kitchen in perfect order. The time had passed much more

quickly than they knew, and they were surprised at the lateness of the hour.

"We've got to run for all we're worth," said Ned, "or we shall be late for dinner, and that will not please father."

"Let us go to the Springs this afternoon," said Grace, "and take our supper with us."

The plan was agreed to by all, and the Conways started for home.

It was not until Zana heard Grace tell her mother where and how the time had been spent, that she realized that she had actually helped a washer-woman's daughter do a washing, and enjoyed it.

"It was fun," she thought, "but I do hope that none of my city acquaintances will ever hear of it!"

CHAPTER IV.

“It seems to me,” said Mr. Conway, when Grace had finished her account of the forenoon, “that Oakwood ought to be making some improvements.”

“I have thought so too,” replied Mrs. Conway. “Ours is a very slow little town, I fear.”

“If the Oakwood young people could think of something besides play,” began Mr. Conway, when he was interrupted by Ned, who never could endure to hear his companions spoken of slightly:

“What have the young people to do about it, I should like to know,” he said.

Had he been at all suspicious, he might have guessed by his mother’s air of consciousness that the subject was not new to her.

“They might have a great deal to do about it,” said Mr. Conway, “and I am surprised that they don’t evince some interest in such matters. I wonder if all young folks are disappointing in such respects?”

It was evident to the mother, though not to the rest, that Mr. Conway was endeavoring to arouse Ned’s indignation.

“I don’t understand you, sir; are not such matters in the hands of the city fathers?”

“In a village like ours a great many improve-

ments are needed," said Mr. Conway. "The elder residents are too busy to realize the need, and not at all inclined to raise money for the purpose. There are usually a large number of care-free young people with plenty of leisure and not wanting in ability. It strikes me that they are the proper persons to undertake such work."

"But if the village can't pay—" began Ned.

"Some cities have enterprising residents who manage such things without causing an increased rate of taxation," said Mr. Conway, interrupting him.

"It is a new thought to me," replied Ned, his face showing how greatly interested he had become.

"Few young people do think of questions of importance," said Mr. Conway; "that is what I complain of."

"Ned, let's talk it over," exclaimed Grace, eagerly. "I can think of many needed improvements. I've often thought of things that I wished could be done. Let's get to work."

"Nice work for a girl!" answered Ned.

"Just the kind of work for a girl," said the father. "Ladies have good taste in such matters, and may be very helpful in raising funds."

"I think that's so," replied Ned, promptly. "I didn't look at it in the right light at first. What had you in mind, Grace?"

"First, I would plant trees along the sides of the streets—"

"The streets should be graded first," interrupted Ned, "or the trees might have to be reset."

"You need more sidewalks, too," said Zana.

"You ought to have your streets paved," put in Rob.

"I think it will be some years before we can have such extensive improvements," said Mr. Conway, smiling, "but a beginning should have been made long ago. I have wished that we might have a park."

"I wonder if we could get the other young people interested?" said Ned.

"It will do no harm to try," answered Grace. "Oh, I have an idea!" she exclaimed, suddenly.

"Salt it!" said Ned, passing the salt.

"Let's get up a sort of proclamation," she continued, "and send it to everybody. 'Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!'" she pretended to be reading from her hand, "'a great public park is to be laid out around the Springs, one of the most beautiful spots—'"

"We might have an item printed in the Journal," suggested Ned, putting a stop to a further hearing of her proclamation by holding one hand over her mouth.

"Why not publish a paper devoted to the interests of city improvements," suggested Mrs. Conway.

"Oh, wouldn't that be fun!" cried Grace, clapping her hands. "Did you ever help to get up a paper, Zana?"

"No, and I think I don't want to. I hate to write compositions."

"This is very different," said Grace.

"Grace and I have edited dozens of papers," said

Ned. "I don't like to write compositions either, but we don't have such things in our papers; we just say what we happen to think about most anything!"

"Oh, most lucid explanation!" exclaimed Zana, with her eyes on the ceiling.

"You understand me, though," said Ned. "Say 'yes' or—" he raised his glass of water and looked at her threateningly.

"Yes, yes, perfectly!" replied Zana hastily.

"Children, do you know what time it is?" asked Mrs. Conway, rising hastily from the table. "Father, you'll be late to the office. We've sat here over an hour. Grace, you must clear away the dishes before you get ready for your picnic; you'll have time if you hurry. I want to walk part way with your father."

"All right, mother; don't hurry back. The walk will do you good, and I'll put everything in order before I go."

"I'll help," said Ned, rolling up his sleeves and beginning to carry the dishes to the kitchen, "and we can go on with our plans while we work."

"You may expect to be entertained with nothing but plan-making, for the next week," said Mrs. Conway to Rob and Zana. "When those children of mine get started on a new idea, they go nearly wild."

"And so do the rest of us!" said Mr. Conway, then he ran for the door with Grace in full pursuit.

"You mustn't touch me now!" he exclaimed as his

foot touched the first of the porch steps, "I'm safe."

"You will not be so fortunate next time," called Grace, as he went down the walk.

Mr. Conway often picked a playful quarrel with his daughter just as he was about to leave the house, and they had agreed that she should punish him as she saw fit if she caught him before he reached the porch steps, but beyond that he was safe.

Grace and Ned often helped each other about their allotted tasks, that they might have more time in which to talk over plans in which both were interested. There was never a brother and sister who enjoyed each other's society more than they. The mother, knowing how many people never realize how blessed they are in having a brother's or sister's love until they have been deprived of it by death or separated by life's duties, took care to impress on the minds of her children the importance of making the most of their years together. By so doing, she had given them something which wealth could not buy, and which would have a lovely influence over their whole lives.

"Our plan bids fair to work beautifully," said Mrs. Conway to her husband, when they had closed their gate behind them.

"Your plan, you mean. If it succeeds you are entitled to the honor."

"Don't say that, please. I couldn't have done a thing had it not been for you. I don't see how you managed to broach the subject so naturally. Had I tried it, I'm sure they would have guessed at once that we had talked it over."

"What a conscientious little woman she is!" said Mr. Conway, playfully.

On the evening preceding the above conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Conway had a long and earnest talk about the necessity of providing amusement for their children.

"I cannot believe in amusement which is indulged in simply for the sake of being amused," Mrs. Conway had said. "It is disappointing, and young people go from one excess to another in search of the pleasure which they never find."

"They say they do find it," replied Mr. Conway. "I often used to envy my young friends, and to wish I were not too poor to join their party."

"I have tried it," said Mrs. Conway. "Before I went to a dance I used to imagine I should have a nice time, and while I was there I was so excited that I never stopped to think whether I was enjoying myself or not; but always when I had returned home and thought it over, it seemed to me that my time had not been used to advantage. Now I look back on the hours spent in that way as wasted, and I do not want our children to have a similar experience."

"It seems to me that pleasure and profit might be so combined as to prove attractive to the young," said Mr. Conway, thoughtfully.

"I believe there is no real pleasure which has not some worthy aim for a foundation," answered Mrs. Conway. Then, after making and discarding as many plans as their children could in the same

length of time, they finally settled on the one just outlined.

When the work was all done as nicely as the most exacting housekeeper could have wished, Grace and Zana filled a basket with luncheon, then went to get ready for the picnic. When they returned to the dining-room they found Ned pulling out the contents of the basket, and piling them on the table.

“What are you doing?” inquired Grace, hurrying to the rescue of the provisions.

“I wanted to see if you had put in any slices of ham,” replied Ned. “I’ve been telling Rob how good it is cooked on the coals.”

“Oh, Ned, what a nuisance you are!” exclaimed Grace, putting the things back in the basket. “You must have pulled the ham out the first thing; it was one of the top bundles.”

“How did I know you had wrapped a rag around it?” asked Ned, as Grace showed him the slices of ham rolled in a napkin.

“It wasn’t necessary for you to know. I think I can be trusted to put up the lunch for——”

“I don’t know whether you can or not,” retorted Ned, “you haven’t put in half bread enough! You must have forgotten how hungry people get at a picnic.”

“Why, Ned——” began Grace, but Zana interrupted.

“Put in more bread, Grace; we’ll never get started if you stop to convince Ned that he doesn’t know more than anyone else about housework.”

"Hear, Zana!" exclaimed Ned, laughing. "She is miffed, yet, because my cake was all eaten, and hers gave the dog a fit of indigestion. Poor old Nero, what a stomach-ache he did have!"

"Ned, you are mean to boast like that!" said Grace. "You must remember that Zana never had anyone to show her how to cook; she could do better now. You must have another trial, some day. There! this basket is ready at last. If you touch it again, Ned, I'll know the reason why."

"So will I," retorted Ned.

"That doesn't mean that you can't carry it," said Grace, quickly.

"Oh, yes, it does, my dear!"

"Now, Ned!"

"Now, Grace!" he mimicked; "little girls don't always like to be taken at their word, do they?"

"You don't want Rob to carry that basket, do you?"

"Certainly not; he is company. You must carry it yourself."

"Very well," said Grace; "I will, and we will go down Main Street. You take the hammocks, Zana, so the boys need not be burdened. I shall enjoy showing the people whom we meet how good we are to them!"

The girls started with the basket and hammocks, but the boys relieved them of their burdens before they had gone a block, as Grace knew they would.

"Oh, Grace!" exclaimed Zana; "we forgot to take a frying-pan. We'll have to ask Helen to take one."

"A frying-pan!" said Ned; "I guess not. What do we want of a frying-pan?"

"To cook the ham, of course, silly! Did you think of eating it raw?"

"Hardly!" answered Ned. "You don't know the first principles of camping out, do you, Zana? We cut a forked stick, and trim the ends to sharp points, which we stick into a slice of ham, then hold it over the fire until it is cooked. Everyone must cook his own meat."

"I should think it would get dirty," said Zana.

"It does get slightly soiled, if you drop it into the ashes, but it tastes just as good."

"We toast bread that way, too," said Grace; "then put the meat on it. You'll see that we shall have finer sandwiches than you ever tasted."

"Perhaps," replied Zana, doubtfully. "How far is it to the Springs?"

"I've been expecting to hear Zade ask that," said Rob, laughing. "My dear," turning to his sister, "have you your smelling-salts? It is nearly five miles to the Springs."

Zana stood still, and stared at her brother. "I'm not going a step farther," she said.

"Oh, come on, Zana," said Grace, laughing; "don't let him tease you; it is only two miles and a half."

"Only two miles and a half!" echoed Zana. "Do you suppose I can walk that distance?"

"You may trot, if you prefer," said Ned.

"Seriously, Grace," continued Zana, paying no attention to Ned; "I shall be sick for a week if I

undertake it. I had no idea it was so far, or I should have told you at once."

"It will not hurt you at all," replied Grace. "Why, Ned and I walked to Williston and back once, and that is ten miles from here."

"But I never walked more than five or six blocks before I came here. You know we have horse-cars at home."

"You've danced until two o'clock in the morning," said Rob. "Ned, whistle 'Coming Thro' the Rye,' please; Zade and I are going to schottische from here to the Springs!"

Rob passed the hammocks to Ned, as he spoke, then, taking his sister around the waist, danced down the street, to her intense disgust, and the great amusement of the pedestrians who happened to witness the performance,

Ned and Grace could hardly keep up with them, and Ned laughed so heartily that no one could have kept step to the music he whistled. When the party reached Helen's door they were all out of breath. Mrs. Dayne and Helen had seen them coming, and went to the door to meet them.

"What can ail you!" exclaimed Helen, and Grace explained while they rested in the cool sitting-room.

"I presume I shall be very weary by the time we get to the Springs," said Rob. "I can walk easier than I can dance, but it is different with Zade."

"I have a great mind not to go another step," said Zana, who was greatly annoyed, and more vexed with her brother than she cared to have the others know.

"You'll have to go," replied Rob, coolly. "You're engaged for this dance, you know!"

"He will behave," said Grace, coaxingly. "It was awfully mean of him, and he must pay for such behavior by being very good all the rest of the day. You will let her alone, won't you, Rob?"

"If she will walk. Zana can walk just as well as you and Helen can, if she only thinks so."

The tone in which this remark was made, caused Zana to look at her brother in surprise. When the little party were again on their way she managed to fall behind the others, and joined Rob, who was walking alone with a very unpleasant frown on his face.

"Rob," she said, "do you really care?"

"Care about what?"

"Because I can't walk and romp as Grace does?"

"Yes, I do," was the emphatic reply. "I like to have you appear just as smart as other girls."

A deep flush settled over Zana's face and neck.

"But, Rob," she said, "I can do as much as any girl in our set."

"What do the girls in our set amount to? Grace is more company for Ned in a minute, than a car-load of such girls would be in all day! He says he has never thought about wishing for a brother."

"Do you wish for a brother?"

"Of course. I think most boys do if they haven't one. Girls are no real fun, except at parties, and then a fellow never dares to say what he thinks to them, but must always give them taffy, and talk

nonsense. Grace is different ; she is every bit as good as a boy ? ”

“ But I’m afraid she wouldn’t be tolerated in society, Rob ; at least, she would be laughed at. And—and you used to say that—that you were proud of my ladylike ways.”

“ Don’t cry, for pity’s sake, Zana ! Let’s not have a scene right here ; the others will be looking around, the first we know. I am proud of your ladylike ways, but I want other folks to know that ladylike ways are not all there is to you.”

The conversation was interrupted by Ned, at this point, who insisted that they had come to a place where it would be perfectly proper for the girls to help carry the bundles.

“ If you don’t,” he said, “ we will sit down here, and eat the contents of one of these baskets ; won’t we, Rob ? ”

“ Yes, we’ll begin on Helen’s. I feel equal to it.” So, to save the provisions until tea-time, the girls took hold of the handles of the baskets and pretended to help, but really did no more than to clasp their fingers around them. The afternoon passed quickly in the beautiful grounds around the Springs. The girls wore old dresses, thick-soled shoes, and large hats, and looked as they felt—comfortable enough to have the best kind of a time. Zana had learned a valuable lesson in respect to dressing for such occasions, since the day when they went after plums.

As soon as the sun began to hide behind the treetops, Rob kindled a fire on a bare spot of ground near the Springs, and Ned went in search of the long

wooden forks which were to serve in cooking meat and toasting bread, and for three strong crotched sticks which were to support a kettle "gypsy-fashion," in which the girls were to make chocolate. The long afternoon in the open air had left them all very hungry, and Zana said she believed she could eat the meat, now, even if it were rolled in ashes.

There are few places of greater natural beauty than this spot which, at that time, had no more pretentious name than The Springs, but is now called Conway Springs, in honor of the successful efforts made by Ned and Grace to have ten acres around them purchased by the town for a park. Three cold water springs within a stone's-throw of each other, were so situated that they resembled, somewhat, a letter A, the top of which was placed more than half way up a steep hill known as the Sugarloaf, the lower part of the letter coming within about ten feet of the foot of the hill. From the upper spring a pretty brook ran straight down into the little lake at the foot of the hill. Between that brook and one of the lower springs was a large flat rock, on which a dozen persons could eat a dinner without being uncomfortably crowded. The two lower springs were afterward turned into two very pretty little fountains, which, with the little brook racing down the steep sides of old Sugarloaf, are worth going miles to see.

"Rescue the perishing," sang Rob, picking a fly out of the butter, and laying it on Zana's hand.

"Please don't, Rob," said Grace, to whom the hymn was dear.

"Ow-wow!" screamed Zana, shaking her hand to

get rid of the poor greasy insect, "take it off, Rob, do!"

"Don't hurt it," commanded Rob, holding her hand still, "the poor little thing is going to crawl around on your hand until it is able to fly."

"Ow-wow-wow! let go my hand, this minute!" Zana showed strong symptoms of hysterics.

"Now, my child, don't get into a panic," said Rob, soothingly. "The fly can't hurt you and it is gaining health rapidly. You have a great deal of mesmerism, Zana, and that is necessary to the well-being of a greasy fly. Should he help himself to a drop of your life-blood ever and anon, don't let it trouble you."

Zana struggled desperately to release her hand, and the more she struggled the worse it seemed to her to have the fly there.

"Rob Conway, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" exclaimed Helen.

"I never knew anyone who had a greater amount of electricity," said Rob, appearing to be too greatly interested in Zana to hear what was said to him. "See how violently it causes her hand to jerk! Really, she looks like a person struggling to free herself from something disagreeable; yet, ladies and gentlemen, I assure you that she is quite contented to sit here with her lily-white hand in mine. She is—oh, great guns!"

Grace had suddenly thrown both arms around him, pinioning his arms to his sides, while Helen held a slice of the uncooked ham pressed close against his face. Zana went to the girls' assistance as soon as

her hands were released, and the young man received nearly as much punishment as he deserved before Ned, who had gone in search of more wood, came to help him.

How much time can be spent in getting and eating supper out of doors, and what great fun it is! The child who has never been given a chance to try it has missed one of the pleasantest experiences of life.

"Rob and I have been to picnics," said Zana, when the tired party were at home again, "but we never had half as much fun as we have had to-day."

"They were cut-and-dried picnics," said Rob, "where everything was planned beforehand and made to go by rule. At a certain time everyone ran to look at something, and if one individual happened to run in the opposite direction, the plans got into a snarl, and so did all the people."

CHAPTER V.

“WELL,” said Mr. Conway, the next morning, as the little family gathered around the breakfast-table, “have you young people made any plans worth hearing?”

“Lots of them!” answered Grace, promptly. “Our plans are always worth hearing, aren’t they, mamma?”

“I think so,” replied Mrs. Conway.

“This is a case in which I should like to be judge,” said Mr. Conway.

“It would take until noon to hear them all,” added Zana. “I never saw anyone like Grace and Ned, about plan-making, and Rob is getting to be just like them.”

“Great compliment to Rob!” said Ned.

“Hear old Egotism!” remarked Rob.

“If there are too many plans, tell me of some of your decisions,” said Mr. Conway.

“Did we reach any decisions, Ned?” asked Grace, laughing.

“Only to circulate a paper, I believe.”

“How many copies?” was Mr. Conway’s next question. Sometimes his children complained that he took their plan-making too seriously, but to-day

they were glad to have him act as if their plans were worth considering.

"We've talked of fifty," replied Ned, "but I don't know as we can do it. We should like to get the grown folks interested as well as the younger ones."

"It will be quite a task to get out so many papers, will it not?"

"We will all be in danger of having writer's cramp," said Rob. "I tell Ned that he ought to have a small printing-press."

"And I asked him where the money was to come from," said Ned.

"If I believed you were really in earnest about this thing——" began Mr. Conway.

"Oh, papa, what would you do?" Grace had left her place at the table, and had both arms around her father's neck. "Would you buy us a printing-press, papa? We've always wished we had one."

"See here, Squirrel! do you mean to choke your old father to death?"

"Not quite." Grace relaxed her hold, and seated herself on her father's knee.

"How can I eat my breakfast with you here?" he inquired, with assumed anxiety.

"You don't need to eat until you have answered my question."

"What question?"

"You are just as provoking as Ned is, papa! This is the question: 'Have you the remotest idea of buying a printing-press for Ned and me?'"

"I was wondering what sort of a Christmas present it would make."

"Oh, father! let us have it now," pleaded Ned.

"I can't afford to buy that, and Christmas presents too."

"Then we will get along without Christmas presents, this year."

"Do you agree to that, Pussy?" asked the father, pinching Grace's ear.

Grace hesitated a moment. Although she was sixteen years old, she enjoyed Christmas presents as much as a child, and both she and Ned always hung up their stockings on Christmas Eve, and examined the contents early the next morning in the mother's bedroom.

"Yes," she said, finally; "we'll promise not to expect one thing from you on Christmas; of course mother can put some little thing in our stockings, just to have the day seem natural to us."

"You silly baby!" said Mr. Conway.

"Not silly at all!" interposed Mrs. Conway. "I shall enter into no bargains which will prevent my putting something into the children's stockings as long as I have them with me."

"Great Scott, mother!" exclaimed Ned, "what a contract you've taken. I'm going to live here always."

"No, you're not," said Grace, "unless you remain single! No sister-in-law will ever divide honors with me."

"Humph!" retorted Ned, "you won't be here. You'll be married and in a home of your own. No brother-in-law will ever divide honors with me!"

"Stop quarrelling, children," said Mrs. Conway, laughing. "I hope it will be many years before either of you are married; but when you are, you may stay at home if you want to. There will be room enough for all."

Rob and Zana exchanged glances. Both knew that the other looked forward eagerly to the time when they could leave home when they pleased. They almost envied their cousins their happy home surroundings.

"My breakfast is nearly cold," said Mr. Conway, and Grace jumped to her feet instantly.

"You poor papa," she said, "how thoughtless I've been! I'm going to make you a slice of toast."

Mr. Conway was very fond of the toast Grace made, and never refused a slice when offered. While he was waiting for it, he asked Ned how he proposed to go to work.

Ned promptly drew a card from his pocket and read with an air of great importance: "First, interest the young people; second, determine what improvement we wish to begin on; third, estimate the cost and find out where the money is coming from; fourth, ask the village council if they will accept such improvement as a gift to the city; fifth, raise the money and go to work."

"Very good, Ned!" exclaimed Mr. Conway. "That is business-like, indeed."

"Thank you, sir," answered Ned, with laughing eyes. "In business ability I greatly resemble my father, but I inherit my extreme beauty from my lovely mother."

"He must mean the end of his nose by 'his extreme beauty,'" said Zana, in an undertone.

"You look like mother!" exclaimed Grace, scornfully. She had returned with the toast in time to hear Ned's last speech. "You know better, Ned! Everyone says I am the picture of her, and I know you don't resemble me."

"Don't I? Oh, say it again!" Ned fell back in his chair, and fanned himself with a slice of bread. "Oh, the refreshing relief," he murmured. "It followed your assertion like sunshine after a thunder-storm."

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed the other young people, falling back and fanning themselves exactly as he had done, and looking comical enough to provoke a smile from the most solemn individual ever seen.

"We can't stand anything so poetic as that, Ned," said Grace. "Please don't do it again."

"Or give us warning, when you feel as if it must come," suggested Rob.

"Let's have a game of tennis before you wash the dishes, girls," proposed Ned.

"All right! Excuse us, mother," Grace said, "I'll hurry back. It won't take long to beat them, will it, Rob?"

"If they wait to beat us, mother," called Ned, "you'd better wash your own dishes!"

The young folks hurried from the house, like little children from a schoolroom, and the father and mother were left for a quiet talk together.

Mrs. Conway was not a particularly pretty woman, but her children thought her beautiful, and nothing

pleased them more than to be told that they resembled her. Ever since they were old enough to think of such things, there had been a good-natured rivalry between them as to which resembled her more nearly.

Mrs. Conway and Grace were more like two girls together than like mother and daughter, and the chivalrous, tender affection which Ned showed for his mother, gained him many more friends than he dreamed of. Other mothers envied Mrs. Conway, and wished their children were as affectionate and obedient as hers, and the young people, even they who were given much more liberty than Ned and Grace, and had less work to do, envied them their pleasant home.

Oakwood was a busy, western village of about two thousand inhabitants, surrounded by the finest farming country in Minnesota. Mr. Conway was its best known and best liked lawyer, and one of the oldest residents. He was also president of the village council, an office which he had held ever since Oakwood was organized. His propositions were usually endorsed by the other members of the council, and he had no doubt that the village would be glad to accept whatever improvements the young people might be induced to make.

“There comes Helen! Oh, I’m so glad!” exclaimed Grace, that afternoon as the girls finished washing the dinner dishes. “Now we can talk it all over.”

“Good-afternoon, Miss Dayne,” said Rob. “Hurry right in, please; Grace wants to talk it all over!”

"Talk what over?" asked Helen.

"She didn't say what."

"Oh, you silly!" said Grace. "You know well enough that I meant our paper."

"Have you decided to go on with it?" inquired Helen.

"Nearly. Just think, Helen, father talks of getting us a printing-press!"

"That will be fine! By the way, who is to be editor?"

"We haven't made any plans since we saw you," said Ned. "You know you are one of the syndicate."

"I am very glad of that, Ned; I shall enjoy the work immensely, I know. Well, suppose we go to work as if we were sure of the printing-press. I propose Grace for editor."

"No, no," said Grace. "I think Ned would do better."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ned. "I can't write. Do you remember my poetry?"

"I do," said Zaria; then in a tone which would have done justice to an orator, she quoted: "This leaf is known by the name of poplar, but what else to say I don't know no more than our old gobbler."

Ned joined in the laughter at his expense, then said, "I'd feel awfully about that poetry, if I hadn't known a few nice men who were not poets. But to business: I'd like to be business manager of our paper, with Rob as assistant."

"Just the thing!" exclaimed the girls, and it was considered settled.

"Then Grace must be editor," said Helen. "I'm not at all suited to such work, and Zana will soon be going home."

"She can be editor-in-chief, with you and Zana for assistants," said Ned, and so it was decided.

Mr. Conway came home earlier than usual that afternoon, and his children knew before he had spoken that he had good news for them.

"We are to have the press, I know!" exclaimed Grace.

"Yes, dear," said Ned, giving her a bear's hug, "here it is! Who else is included in the 'we'? Who wants a press?" and he looked at the other girls with both arms extended, but they begged to be excused.

"When will it be here, papa?" asked Grace.

"Day after to-morrow, I think."

"How much will it cost?" inquired Ned.

"Fifty dollars. Quite an expensive plaything, isn't it?"

"I am afraid it is more expensive than you can afford. Couldn't you have bought one cheaper?"

"Yes, my son, but not nearly so good. There is no reason why a very nice paper should not be printed on this."

"I believe there will be, some day, papa," said Grace.

That evening, Grace got the dictionary, and began studying the rules for proof-reading, and soon became so absorbed that she was oblivious to all else.

"Grace goes at things with such desperate earnestness," said Zana, who was watching her. "She

even plays as if her life depended on her accomplishing just so much."

Then, finding that Grace was too busy even to hear her, she opened her book and began to read. Some half hour later, Rob happened to notice her. Creeping stealthily up behind her, he reached over her shoulder and took the book from her hand.

"What is it that you find so interesting?" he asked, then read aloud from the book: "The Lady Geraldine lay unconscious in the arms of her lover, who pressed her fondly to his heart."

"Rob, stop that," commanded Zana. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Why?" asked Rob. "Is it worse to read it aloud than to read it to one's self? You looked as if you were enjoying it."

"Read it again, Rob; it is beautiful!" said Ned, his face alive with mischief.

Rob read it over and over until all the family begged, declaring that it almost made them sick.

"Such things don't sound well, I know," began Zana, "but——"

"But they're lovely in real life," said Ned, interrupting her. "Is that it, Zana?"

Zana was too vexed to reply.

"Silence gives consent," said Rob. "I have a mind to try acting a scene for her benefit."

As he spoke, a new idea flashed across his mind.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, taking his sister, much against her will, before the long mirror at the other end of the room, and placing her where she could get a good view of herself.

"Now," said he, as he put his arms around her and drew her head to his shoulder, "you are the Lady Geraldine, and I am the lover! 'Oh, you bootiful itty, tootsy-wootsy?'—young lady, open your eyes and look in that glass! you have got to see how such things look. Ned, I think you'll have to come and hold her eyes open; I can't do two things at once."

"With pleasure," responded Ned. "Look, Zana," he added as he held her eyelids open, "isn't that a scene to make a crocodile weep?"

"Boys, don't be rough," said Mrs. Conway, and Zana was released at once, when she left the room without speaking.

"She is offended," said Ned.

"She will get over it," answered Rob, carelessly, "and it may make her sick of such trashy stories. She brought as many as a dozen with her, and when she gets started on one she can't think of anything else."

"They will ruin her mind," said Mrs. Conway, who had been examining the book which Rob had taken from Zana, "and she ought not to read such trash; but I'm afraid your way of exerting an influence will not be successful, Rob, my boy."

"I don't know that I started to exert an influence," answered Rob. "I think my principal idea was to have a little fun. I hardly think I should be able to influence Zana, even if I wished to do so."

"There is something wrong somewhere, if that is a fact," said Mrs. Conway. "You ought to have as much influence over her as your parents have,

and she over you. I should be very sorry if my children did not care to please each other. If you think it is wrong for Zana to read such books, and you have good reason for thinking so, it is your duty to try to get her to stop it. If you don't try, you are partially to blame for whatever harm they may do her."

Rob made no reply, but it was evident that his thoughts were started in a new direction, and no one was surprised when he arose and went in search of Zana. He found her sitting at one end of the porch, crying bitterly.

"Why, Zana," he said, taking a seat beside her, "what ails you? Did we hurt you? We played rougher than we should, I know."

"I am not hurt," replied Zana. "I should not cry if I were; but—but you are always ridiculing me before folks, Rob, and I don't like it. Ned never treats Grace as you do me, and you never acted as you have since we came here."

"It is because you are so silly when compared with Grace," replied Rob, blundering, as a boy is apt to at such times.

"Thank you!" said Zana, stiffly, "that is one of the speeches which one enjoys hearing from one's brother."

"You know well enough what I mean," said Rob, desperately. "If a fellow cares anything at all for his sister, he wants her to appear as well as other girls——"

"That will do, Rob," said Zana, coldly; "you may keep the remainder of that fine speech for the girls who are perfect enough to please you."

With that parting shot, Zana went into the house and up to her own room, leaving her brother alone.

“Just as I expected,” said Rob. “We never have understood each other, and never shall. I’ll act as if nothing had happened, to-morrow, and so will she, and that will be the end of it. There is no use in our trying to chum it as Ned and Grace do.”

CHAPTER VI.

Two weeks passed, and the first issue of the new paper, "The Oakwood Transcript," was nearly ready for mailing.

Mr. Conway deposited fifty dollars in the bank which the children were to have for a reserve fund, and agreed to take his pay in advertising. Ned had succeeded in securing several advertisements from business men in town with whom he was acquainted, and it was evident that the young people were going to take up their new amusement in a business-like manner.

"I think it will prove to be money well invested," said Mr. Conway to his wife, when they had returned to the sitting-room after watching the young people who were spending the evening in setting type. It was new work and not easy, but even Rob and Zana found it fascinating, and could hardly wait to see the first complete copy of "The Oakwood Transcript."

Helen worked hard all day, helping her mother with the washing, for they always took in extra work during vacation, but her evenings were now spent with the Conways, in the room which they had fitted up for their office and work-room.

"Oh dear!" she said, as Mr. and Mrs. Conway

left the room, "I wish we might have some illustrations for our paper."

"You are the artist of the crowd," replied Zana, "why don't you furnish them?"

"I might draw something, but how could we get it printed? I don't know the first thing about wood-engraving."

"You ought to learn," said Rob. "I know a fellow who is going to be a wood-engraver. He says he expects to make piles of money, and he can't draw as well as you do. I should think it would be much easier work than washing."

"It would be much pleasanter, at any rate. Whenever I read a story that I like, I wish I could illustrate it just as I see it in my mind. Oh, Ned, don't put that advertisement in in that way! It looks awfully stiff."

"What difference does that make?" asked Rob; "it is only an advertisement. Ned, can't you put some rosebuds around the hardware man's ad.?"

"I think we should make every part of the paper look as attractive as possible," answered Helen, "but I am not sure that stoves and rosebuds would produce the proper effect."

"I want the ads. to attract attention, whether anything else does or not," said Ned, "for that is the way to get more. We ought to make enough from our advertising to pay our running expenses after a while. Helen, I do wish you could draw pictures for my advertisements."

"So do I. Wouldn't it be fun! We might get more advertisements than the 'Oakwood Journal,'

If you would put that entire line in capitals, Ned, it would look better. If I could, I would make that line 'Our,' then a picture of some shoes, then one of a shoemaker's last. See? 'Our shoes last!'"

"That would be immense!" exclaimed Ned. "Helen, why can't you learn?"

"For the same reason that I can't take a trip to Europe," replied Helen, with a laugh. "I wish we had a few fancy letters, Ned," she added; "they would help a great deal."

"Hel-e-e-n!" shouted Rob, with his mouth close to Helen's ear.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Helen. "Why don't you frighten anyone to death?"

"I mean to," replied Rob, coolly, "if she doesn't pay some attention to me. I spoke to you three times, and you couldn't so much as hear the echo of my dulcet tones."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

"Don't be in a hurry, my child! I wish to take my time. Mine is a question which cannot be dealt with in haste. Haste and questions of importance were never intended to go together. Haste makes waste, and my time is far too precious to be recklessly thrown away. Time, my dear young lady, is money. The more time you have, the more——"

"Tell me when you have finished your discourse," interrupted Helen; "I am going to work, now."

"No, you're not! You are going to give me your exclusive attention for as long a time as you devoted to Ned. I'll have you understand that I am of just as much importance as he is. As I was

about to say,—ahem ! what was I about to say, Ned?"

"I don't know ; wasn't it about the tariff question?"

"Oh, yes ;" replied Rob.

"Don't worry, Helen," said Grace, "it won't take him long to tell all he knows on that subject."

"That depends entirely on the way I tell it," replied Rob. "I can make a few ideas go a long way, when I undertake to. I'll drop the tariff, Helen, if you will tell me how these headlines ought to be set."

"That is all he wanted to say in the first place," said Zana.

"Of course," replied Rob ; "but I wanted to have it seem as important as some of the conversations between Ned and Helen."

The young people worked and planned and joked each other, and the hours passed so swiftly that they could hardly believe it when Mrs. Conway came to tell them that the office must be closed for the night. She insisted on her children keeping early hours, much to their disgust at times ; but she assured them that by that means she was securing to them her best legacy, and insisted on being obeyed.

Ned walked home with Helen, and Grace went into her mother's room and locked the door.

"Mother, how much would it cost for a girl to learn wood-engraving ?"

"I don't know, child ; it is something I never thought about. Why do you ask ?"

"Do you suppose it is a paying business ?"

"I have always thought so ; but I really don't know. Why, Grace?"

"I wish Helen could take it up. I hate to think of her spending her time over the washtub when she is capable of better things."

"I thought she hoped to be an artist."

"She does ; but papa says no young artist can make his living, and Helen has no one to help her."

"Well?" asked the mother, smiling.

"I believe you know what I'm thinking about, mother." Grace threw herself on a low stool, and rested her head on her mother's knee.

"Is it the new cloak?"

"That is just it. Does my old one look so very shabby?"

"It doesn't look very well."

"I have forty-five dollars saved up for the new cloak. That is what Susie Long's astrachan cost. I suppose it would give Helen quite a start."

The mother did not answer, but gently stroked the tumbled hair.

"I couldn't ask papa for another cent, now he has spent so much for us, could I?"

"It would not be right for you to ask for money to give away when he already makes you as great an allowance as he can afford."

"What ought I to do, mother?"

"You must decide that for yourself, little girl. It would undoubtedly be a great thing for Helen to take lessons in wood-engraving, but that is no reason why you should deprive yourself of the new cloak, unless you choose to. Your old one is very shabby,

and too small, and it will not be easy for you to wear it another winter. If I were you I should not decide hastily. Consider the question carefully, and when you have reached a decision you will be better able to stick to it. You know what papa says of fickle-minded people."

"I know," answered Grace, smiling; then she kissed her mother on both cheeks, as had been her custom since babyhood. "Good-night, mammy; you are the best and loveliest mother that ever lived."

Grace went directly to her closet and took down her old plush cloak.

"Ho!" exclaimed Zana, "what have you there? Did it come from the Ark?"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied Grace.

"Was it worn by our venerable great grandmother?"

"It has been worn two winters by your humble servant."

"I can't imagine a servant humble enough to wear it another winter," said Zana. "Honestly, Grace, did you go anywhere last winter with that thing on?"

"I did, my dear. It does look shabby, doesn't it?" Grace suppressed a sigh, and hung the cloak in the closet again, then prepared to go to bed. When she knelt to say the evening prayer that she had repeated ever since she was a baby, she added these words: "Dear Heavenly Father, help me not to care about the old cloak, for I feel as if I must give the money to Helen."

Before Grace went to sleep, that night, she had

planned just how her friend was to be induced to take the money.

"Helen is so proud," she thought, "that it will not be easy to make her mind; but I'll tell her that I want to get money ahead for a bicycle, or something that she has heard me wish for, and then I'll propose to lend it to her and take her note. I'll tell her that I want to put it where I can't spend it. She'll object, of course, but I'll make her see that it is a duty she owes to her mother to fit herself, as rapidly as possible, to support herself. I do want her to be able to earn money in a way that no one can object to; but I can't tell her that—that is, unless every other argument fails."

The next evening was spent by the girls in addressing wrappers for the papers, and by the boys in pasting them around the first copies of the "Oakwood Transcript." The papers were carried to the post-office late that evening, and although the girls were very tired, they decided to accompany the boys, and all the way they talked of their paper. They were possessed by a sort of anxious excitement that they found far from unpleasant. They tried to imagine how the paper would be received, and really hoped that the editor of the "Journal" would not think that they meant to injure him in the least! Suppose he should try to kill their paper? Each one had suggestions to offer as to the best course to pursue in such a case, and they felt that, at least, he would not find them unprepared. Should they succeed in rousing an interest in village improvements? That was the most important question; for if they failed,

everyone would laugh at them, especially after reading the leading editorial. They could think of nothing but their paper, and there was seldom a moment when less than two of them were talking at once. When Zana reached home again, she was quite horrified to discover that she had actually walked to the post-office and back in an old calico wrapper which belonged to Grace, and which, after much lecturing, she had been induced to wear while at work. There could be no stronger proof of Zana's interest in the new amusement.

The next morning, Mr. Conway found a copy of the "Oakwood Transcript" beside his plate, and four young people studied his face furtively as he looked over its pages.

"Very good!" he said, finally, "very good indeed. I did not believe you could do so well at first."

"The editors and publishers of the 'Oakwood Transcript' are satisfied with your praise, most noble sir," said Ned; "knowing, as we do, that you never praise what you do not think worthy."

"Who wrote the leading editorial?" asked Mr. Conway, a moment later, a smile playing around the corners of his mouth.

Grace looked uneasy. "Why, papa?" she asked; "is it awful?"

"Not awful, but somewhat startling. Did you write it?"

"That soul-stirring editorial was written by the syndicate," announced Ned with a great flourish.

"By the syndicate!" repeated Zana. "I should like to know what you had to do about it."

“Wrote the title, madam !” answered Ned, promptly.

“You suggested it, and Grace wrote it.”

“I revised it. There is an artistic finish to the revision which would draw tears to the eyes of a Raphael. No careless hand could execute work like that. No inferior mind——”

Ned was interrupted by a sudden pushing back of chairs, as three persons left their seats simultaneously, looked at the editorial page over Mr. Conway’s shoulder, and read this :—

OUR INTRODUCTION !!!  AHEM !

“The exclamation points call attention to the introduction,” explained Ned, coolly; “then comes the hand-shake, followed by the introductory cough ! I’ll bet that will take immensely.”

“Ned, when did you do that ?”

There was an iciness in Grace’s voice that warned her hearers of an approaching storm.

“The last thing before going to press. I thought you might object if I told you of my intention, for you do not have an artistic eye, you know.”

“What right had you to touch it? I thought I was editor of this paper. Father, does an editor have rights, or——”

“That the manager is bound to respect when they interfere with his ideas of the fitness of things,” interrupted Ned, laughing.

“It is no laughing matter, Ned Conway,” said

Grace, indignantly. "I would rather have given ten dollars than that my editorial should have gone in like that. Such an idiotic looking thing as it is! Anyone with common sense would have known better than to do such a thing."

"Softly, softly, my daughter," cautioned Mrs. Conway.

"I can't help being provoked about it, mother. There my name is on the paper as editor, and look at that thing! Just look at it, mother!"

Taking the paper from her father, Grace held it under her mother's eyes, assuming quite a tragical attitude.

"It doesn't look well, I must admit," said Mrs. Conway, laughing a little in spite of her attempt to look serious. "Ned, what made you do it?"

"Just for a joke, mother. I thought Grace would see the fun in it the first thing."

"It's a pretty poor joke to make one's sister a laughing-stock for the whole village," said Grace, angrily. "I would cease joking if I couldn't be a little more gentlemanly about it."

"I didn't think about the whole village, mother," said Ned, with sarcastic emphasis, "or I suppose I shouldn't have done it. It seems to me, however, that Grace is making a great deal of fuss over a very small affair."

As he spoke, he arose from his chair, asked his mother to excuse him, and left the table without having touched his breakfast. The rest of the family ate theirs in silence. A darker cloud had fallen over the sunshiny home than had been seen there for a

long time, and all on account of the paper which was to have furnished only amusement.

Mr. Conway hurried to his office immediately after breakfast, and Mrs. Conway went about her work with a grieved look on her face that made her children feel extremely uncomfortable. Ned and Grace avoided each other as much as possible, and had little to say to anyone else, and Rob and Zana spent the most of the forenoon together.

“What a fuss they make over a little disagreement,” said Zana.

“I should say so! You and I might quarrel a week, and I doubt if father and mother would know anything about it, or care.”

“I wish Ned and Grace would make up, don’t you, Rob? Somehow, quarrelling seems out of place in this house.”

“It does produce an uncomfortable sensation.”

“I presume if father and mother were more like Uncle Charles and Aunt Marie, you and I would be careful not to disagree so much.”

“Maybe. We haven’t had a spat worth mentioning since we came here, I believe, and we never agreed so well before.”

Ned and Grace attended to their usual duties, that morning, with very sober faces. They were both heartily ashamed of themselves, and wanted to say so, but did not know how to do it without wounding their pride more than they cared to.

“Ned ought to speak first,” thought Grace, “because he is most to blame. He had no right to play such a trick on me. If he would just

hint that he is sorry, I would be glad to forgive him."

"When Grace gets ready to be good-natured again," thought Ned, "she can say so. I'm not angry, and haven't been any of the time; but I don't intend to get down on my knees and beg her to smile."

The forenoon wore slowly away. Rob and Zana went for a walk, Ned was busy in the garden, and Grace and her mother were left alone in the sitting-room which they were putting to rights. They always worked together, whenever it was possible for them to do so, and had some of their nicest visits while thus engaged. Grace could not remember the time when she had not been allowed to help mother. One of her earliest recollections is of standing on a chair drying the spoons and knives and forks while mother washed and wiped the rest of the dishes. To-day she remembers one day in particular. She was very busy with the spoons, and mother asked her what she thought about beginning, that afternoon, to can the raspberries. Grace thinks that her mother must always have talked to her as if she were grown up, but she is sure that she never did any thinking until that day.

Mother seemed very serious, and the little girl was anxious to give an answer that would prove quite as helpful as seemed to be expected of her; but what should she say? In all her short life, she had never thought of the word "can" in that connection. She pondered over it so long, that mother finally asked her of what she was thinking.

"Mamma," she said, "when I said 'I can help you,' you said, 'can you?' Did you can me then?"

Grace laughs, now, when she thinks of that scene; but she remembers that her mother did not hurt her baby dignity by laughing at her then, but explained as carefully as if her question had been of the greatest importance.

"Mother has always been careful not to hurt my feelings," she thought, "and sometimes she must have ached to laugh at me; yet I can hurt her without troubling myself even to be sorry."

She felt that her mother was looking at her, and turned away. She knew just what sort of expression she should see in those dark eyes, and did not care to meet it in her present mood.

"I dusted that vase, Gracie," said Mrs. Conway, finally; "didn't I do it well?"

"I don't know—why, yes, of course! I wasn't thinking about my work, mamma."

"I have known that for the last ten minutes, dear."

Grace threw her dust-rag on the nearest chair, and buried her face on her mother's shoulder.

"You think I'm perfectly awful, don't you, mother?"

"No, dear; you know I couldn't think that if I tried."

"Well, I am! I know you are grieved when Ned and I quarrel, and I had no right to say what I did to him, especially before Rob and Zana."

"I do not want you to feel sorry simply because I am grieved, Gracie. I thought you and Ned realized how greatly blessed you are in having each

other to love, and that, since you cannot expect always to be together, you ought to make the most of every minute. When you forget yourselves as you did this morning——”

“It isn’t because we don’t love each other, mamma ; I simply lost my temper, and you don’t know how ashamed I feel about it now.”

“Yes, dear, I think I do. I quarrelled with my only brother, once, over as trifling a matter as that, and he went hunting with some friends before we made up. I was ashamed of myself before I had been alone five minutes. My dear brother shot himself accidentally, that day, and was brought home dead. Grace, can you think how I felt then ?”

“Oh, mamma ! Oh, poor, poor mamma !” Grace raised a very white face from her mother’s shoulder, and with her own handkerchief wiped the tears from her mother’s eyes.

“Where is Ned ?” she asked, suddenly. “I’m going to find him, this minute.”

“I saw him out in the garden not long ago.”

Ned, with a very gloomy countenance, was weeding the strawberry-bed, when he was startled by a sudden rush behind him, and before he could turn to see who was coming, Grace had thrown both arms around his neck.

“Ned,” she sobbed, “please forgive me ! I was just as cross as I could be, and I’m awfully sorry.”

“Don’t talk that way, Gracie ; it makes me feel cheap. I have been most to blame, and too cowardly to say so ; but you can’t think how mean I feel. What can I do to fix it ?—that page, you know ?”

"It don't need fixing!" Grace locked up and laughed through her tears. "It's—it's real funny, only—only I didn't see—"

"It isn't funny, at all, but I thought it was going to be, or I never should have done it. I wonder if I couldn't explain it in the next paper? There come Rob and Zana! Let's act as if nothing had happened!" and Ned, who had a boyish dislike to a scene, took his arm from around his sister's waist, and devoted himself to his work, while Grace feigned to assist him. They were too late, however, for Rob and Zana had seen, and were congratulating themselves that the cloud had blown over, and the good times were to begin again.

"Been kissing and making up like good children?" asked Rob.

"Did you see us?" said Grace.

"We caught sight of a very lover-like scene as we came up the walk," replied Zana, "and Rob christened it 'Reconciliation.' Rob and I don't do things that way?"

"Do you quarrel?" asked Grace.

"Quarrel!" Rob laughed. "Why, cats and dogs are nowhere compared with us, are they, Zade! But we get over it easier than you do."

"I look sideways at Rob to see if he is feeling better," interrupted Zana, laughing, "and after awhile, I catch him looking sideways at me; then we both laugh, and talk about something else as if nothing had happened."

"But don't you feel dreadfully ashamed afterwards?" asked Grace.

"Ashamed! Why should we? Everybody quarrels with those with whom they are obliged to live. Papa and mamma have a quarrel nearly every day."

"Why, Zana Conway! I can't believe it!" Grace looked at her cousin so seriously, that Zana was obliged to laugh.

"You goosie!" she exclaimed. "One would think I had told you of a murder. Their quarrelling doesn't amount to anything. They think just as much of each other."

"I think it is dreadful!" said Grace. "I believe I should cry my eyes out if papa and mamma should quarrel as Ned and I did this morning. I shall never get over feeling ashamed of myself, and I don't see how Ned can forgive me so easily for talking so."

"You ought not to forgive me at all," replied Ned, straightening himself and piling the handful of weeds, which he had just pulled from the strawberry-bed, on his sister's head. "There is such a thing as going too far with one's jokes, and in future I mean to try to think of the other party a little more."

When Mr. Conway came home at noon, he noticed, at once, that the trouble of the morning had cleared away.

"Well, children," he said, with a sly twinkle in his eyes, "do you feel better?"

"Very much, papa," answered Grace, with a blush and smile.

"Is Ned possessed of a decent amount of common-sense now?"

"Please don't, papa ! I think I was the one who must have been lacking in that respect."

"Father, how can I manage to let the readers know that Grace is not to blame for that piece of work ?" asked Ned.

"Why did you not think of that in the first place, my son ?"

"I didn't have time."

"I would advise you to take time, in future. It is wiser never to play a practical joke until you have thought it out, putting yourself in your victim's place."

"Ned wouldn't have been so silly as I was, papa. He never gets angry when a joke is played on him, and I ought to have had more sense."

"This little misunderstanding convinces me that the editor-in-chief of the 'Oakwood Transcript' should have a business interview with the manager," said Mr. Conway. "There should be a written agreement as to the rights and duties of each."

"He thinks we are not to be trusted," said Ned, with a nod to Grace.

"The present arrangement is not business-like," replied Mr. Conway, "and would be sure to bring trouble in some way, sooner or later. Now let us have that editorial, Ned. I didn't have time to read it this morning; and haven't time now."

"It will give me pleasure to read it," said Ned, a merry light darting into his eyes. Grace's cheeks suddenly became very rosy, as they always did when anything which she had written was to be

read aloud, and she regarded her plate with unusual attention.

"Dear readers," read Ned, in a caressing tone of voice, "dear little readers——"

"That isn't there, papa," interrupted Grace.

"That's so ; it isn't!" exclaimed Ned, examining the page closely. "I repeated. I'll begin again. Dee-ah-weadahs, in intwoduthing——"

"Ned, you're mean!" said Zana. "Give the paper to me ; I'll read it."

"No, you won't," replied Ned, "unless you pay me for the privilege. If there is one thing which I love more than everything else it is reading introductory editorials. I must begin again. Dear-r-r-r-r-reader-r-rs!"

Grace sprang from her seat, and covered Ned's mouth with one hand, while she firmly held his nose with the other.

"Take the paper away from him, Zana," she said. "I'll not let him get a breath until he gives it up!"

"What will you pay?" asked Ned, in muffled tones, moving his head from side to side in an attempt to free himself, and holding the paper with both hands between his knees.

"Give it to me, and you may have my piece of pie," promised Zana, and peace was established at once.

"Dear readers," began Zana, "in introducing to you the first copy of the 'Oakwood Transcript,' we feel that no apology for its presence before you should be made, since it——"

"Uncle," interrupted Rob, "ought Grace to have

used the word 'feel' in that place? I told her that she should have said 'think.' She shouldn't say 'feel' unless she refers to touch in some way, should she?"

"In this place 'feel' is respectable usage, isn't it, papa? Rob is foolishly critical; don't you think so?"

"Don't imagine that you are going to involve me in one of your disputes," replied Mr. Conway, laughing. "I refuse to be catechized, and I'll not be judge."

"But, uncle, don't you see——" began Rob.

"Rob," interrupted Grace, "if Zana were sick you would say she feels badly, wouldn't you?"

"No, indeed! I should say Zana 'thinks' she is sick."

"Wouldn't you feel sorry for her?"

"No; I might be sorry, though."

"Do you never feel good or bad about anything?"

"Never, madam! I'm rejoiced or grieved, whichever mental emotion may be in order!"

"The editorial!" called Mr. Conway. "Let us have that, if you please. Your dispute can be settled quite as well some other time."

"Will you see that I am not interrupted again, uncle?" asked Zana.

"I will try to keep order," he replied, taking up the carving knife, and assuming an expression of severity; then Zana began reading again:

"Dear readers, in introducing to you the first copy of the 'Oakwood Transcript,' we feel that no

apology for its presence before you should be made, since it comes with an object in view which no one can think unworthy attention. Its aim is to appeal particularly to the young people of Oakwood, whom it wishes to interest in village improvements. No one can deny that it is a subject which should have received earnest attention long, long ago."

"Long, long ago, long ago!" wailed Ned, in a dreamy falsetto, and Mr. Conway brandished the carving-knife so fiercely that Ned hid his head on his mother's shoulder.

"The married inhabitants of the village," continued Zana, "are all too absorbed in their own affairs to give the subject the attention which it deserves, and if Oakwood is ever to have the needed improvements, it must look to its young people for them."

"The inhabitants of Oakwood are divided into two classes," interrupted Rob; "married people and young people. Old maids and old bachelors——"

Grace helped herself to Rob's pie, and the rest of the sentence was lost in his effort to gain possession of it again without making too much noise.

"If," continued Zana, "the 'Oakwood Transcript' can arouse an interest in village improvements which will, at least, give us a start on the road which every enterprising village must travel, it will feel that it has not been quite a failure. All it asks, dear reader, is your hearty endorsement and active support."

"Very modest, certainly," said Mr. Conway, laying down the carving-knife, as Zana finished reading.

"Is it horrid, papa?" Grace looked troubled.

"Horrid! I should say not. I have read editorials not nearly so good in the 'Journal.'"

"Oh, father!" expostulated Mrs. Conway. "you shouldn't flatter the child."

"No flattery about it." protested Mr. Conway. "Gracie understands that I do not refer to the usual leading editorial in the 'Journal.' This is her first attempt, and I am proud of it; but I shall not be proud of her unless she does very much better before long."

"I'll try, papa," said Grace, softly.

"Don't go yet, uncle." pleaded Zana. "I have something else to read to you."

"Is it very long?"

"Not very. I'll read fast. Rob wrote it."

"Is that so? Well, then, I must hear it, mustn't I?"

"Take notice," began Zana. "See, uncle," showing him the paper. "those two words are printed in immense capitals to attract attention. Take notice: On the evening of the twenty-fifth of September, a meeting will be held in the editorial office of the 'Oakwood Transcript,' Conway House, for the purpose of organizing a society devoted to the interests of village improvements. Officers will be elected, ways and means discussed, and all suggestions from interested parties given due consideration. All are cordially invited to be present. The subscription price of the 'Oakwood Transcript' is fifty cents a year. Stamps accepted. Old clothes not taken in exchange. Bring your subscription fee with you."

"What's that?" shouted Rob, springing from his

chair and looking over Zana's shoulder. "Ned, you rascal! when did you add that?"

"Just before going to press," answered Ned, looking as if he did not know whether to laugh or cry. "I thought it would be a fine opportunity to get in something business-like. I'm sorry, though, Rob."

"Well, you needn't be," replied Rob, taking the paper and turning to another page. "Just let your eye rest on that!"

Ned obeyed and read: "Brown, the furniture man, has the finest bedbugs in the city." "Who in time—" he began.

"I did, Ned," confessed Rob. "and I have felt sick over it all the morning. It seemed as if fifty pounds had been lifted from my shoulders when I found that you had played the same trick on me."

"Brown will be hopping mad," said Ned. "and he was my best advertiser."

Ned looked at the advertisement again, then burst into a peal of laughter so infectious that he was instantly joined by the whole family.

"I know now just how you felt, Grace," he said at last, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"It is funnier to play a joke on another, than to have one played on yourself, isn't it, my son?" asked Mr. Conway.

"It is more comfortable," replied Ned, "but nothing could look funnier than that advertisement. I suspect that I'll have to apologize to Mr. Brown for a week, and give him one or two free ads, besides, before he will have anything more to do with me."

"Really, children," said Mrs. Conway, "I think

you would better resolve not to use your paper again as a medium for practical joking. If you wish it to be influential it must not seem trifling."

"We will make rules this afternoon, mother, and let you see them before we sign them," promised Grace.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was the evening of the twenty-fifth of September, and a merry party of young people were gathered in the editorial office of the "Oakwood Transcript." In spite of his protestations, Rob was made chairman.

"I never was chairman in my life," he said, "and I never attended a meeting where there was a chairman; at least, such an individual was never pointed out to me."

"You can never learn younger," replied Ned. "Go ahead, Rob; I'll warrant that you'll get through all right."

"We're not critical," called a voice from the crowd. "I presume there isn't a fellow here who knows more than you do about it, unless it is Grace."

There was a general laugh at this, in which Grace joined heartily. She was accustomed to being spoken of as a "nice fellow," by her boy friends, and did not mind it in the least, even though she knew that it shocked Zana.

"It makes you seem so very masculine," Zana had said to her only the day before, "and you must be more to blame than the boys. I don't believe

they would speak of you as a good fellow unless your manner invited such rudeness."

"Is it rude?" asked Grace, calmly. "It doesn't seem so to me. My boy friends speak to me and of me as they do of one another."

"Of course they do, and it is perfectly awful. You are a young lady, Grace, not a child."

"What of it?"

"You are old enough to begin to accept attentions from young gentlemen, and they never care for girls to whom they are not obliged to be polite."

"Oh, sugar! Zana, you make me sick. I'm only sixteen years old, and if I've got to adopt sentimental airs, and be waited upon as if I didn't have sense enough to take care of myself, and lose my freedom, and—and be perfectly horrid, I'd like to know the reason why! I am not a young lady. I don't want to be one, and I won't be just as long as I can help it, and I hope I'll be called a good fellow for at least ten years yet."

"You wouldn't if you knew what other folks think about such things."

"I don't care what other folks think if mother is satisfied; and if she were not, you may be sure I should have known it long before this. She likes to have me exert a good influence over my boy friends."

"A good influence!" Zana laughed. "As if your allowing them to call you a fine fellow helped me to exert a good influence."

"Well, it does. They tell me everything just as if I were a boy, and ask my advice about things,

and I know that I have influenced them for good ever so many times when they were tempted to be foolish."

Grace had a nature much too healthy to be disturbed by Zana's arguments on that subject. There was nothing silly or affected about her, and her greatest worry was caused by the knowledge that some day she would be so old that even her own family could no longer consider her entitled to the privileges of a little girl, which, in her opinion, were far more to be desired than those granted the young ladies of her acquaintance.

On this evening she looked at Zana with a smile of amusement when she heard herself classed among the "other fellows," and replied that she was delighted to be given credit for knowing something, even if, as in the present instance, it was on a subject of which she knew absolutely nothing.

"Well," said Rob, with the air of a martyr, "if I must, I must."

He went to the little table which had been prepared for the chairman, and lifted his chair over his head so suddenly and fiercely that some of the girls dodged as if they expected him to hurl it at them.

"Come to order," he shouted, "or meet me in the woodshed!"

"Please, Rob, be good," began Zana.

"Silence!" commanded Rob, threatening her with the chair. "No talking allowed here. Now, who speaks first?"

No one answered. The young people of Oakwood

had never had experience with such a chairman as Rob, and were taken so completely by surprise that for a moment they were speechless. Rob's most intimate friends said that he was born to be an actor; however that may be, he certainly succeeded, on this occasion, in acting more like a madman than a boy of sound sense. Even Ned could think of nothing to say; but a glance into his face would have been enough to convince anyone that he was thoroughly enjoying Rob's acting. Grace was the first to recover her presence of mind.

"It is getting late, Rob," she began.

"Silence!" interrupted Rob, in a voice that made the girls clap their hands over their ears, and brought Mr. and Mrs. Conway to the door. "Am I chairman of this meeting," he continued, oratorically, "or am I not? If I am chairman, then, by the chairs of my forefathers, I will be obeyed! When I command silence, silence there shall be, yea, even unto death; and he who dares to disobey me shall meet me in the arena, and with his head and shoulders jammed between the legs of a child's high-chair, shall give me answer why. Dost think that I will tamely submit to being an object of your insolent disobedience? I! the chairman of this——"

Rob was interrupted by a merry laugh, and turning, he saw Mr. and Mrs. Conway standing in the doorway. He blushed with confusion, for he had not known they were there, and he would have preferred not to have had them hear his first effort at speech-making. The young people were delighted over his discomfort and joined in a very boisterous

shout of joy. By the time they became quieter, Rob had recovered his self-possession.

"That was a telling speech, Rob," said his uncle, "but what was it about?"

"They insisted on making me chairman of this meeting," replied Rob, "even after I had told them that I knew nothing of the duties required of such a personage. I was doing my best to fill the position! Arguing that a chairman must be a man with a chair—"

"Oh! Oh-h-h!" groaned the audience in concert; and so many pretended to be in a fainting condition that Rob decided not to finish his explanation.

"Don't you mean to try to do better than that, Rob?" asked Helen.

"How can I when I don't know any better?" he replied with the unconcern of one who felt sure of victory. Rob was convinced that by maintaining his position, he should be relieved of the duties assigned him.

"Then, Grace, you must take the place," declared Helen.

"I guess Rob will behave; won't you, Rob?" pleaded Grace.

"My dear cousin, I am behaving beautifully," replied Rob.

"He will manage to make us waste the entire evening," said Helen, "and we have work to do."

"Let Ned be chairman," suggested Grace.

"He will be no better, now that Rob has supplied him with a mischievous idea," replied Helen, in a

tone of great conviction, and so it was decided that Grace must be chairman—a position which she always filled most acceptably.

We have no space for an account of the proceedings, for this first meeting of the “Village Improvement Association,” as they called themselves, lasted nearly three hours, and all the members became so enthusiastic that a great deal was said during that time.

As soon as the members of the new society had taken their departure, the four young Conways and Helen hastened into the sitting-room where Mr. and Mrs. Conway awaited them.

“Most honored parents,” exclaimed Ned, “allow me to congratulate you !”

“What for ?” asked Mrs. Conway.

“For having four such remarkable relatives, to be sure. We are successes, madam, gigantic successes ! and our most beautiful and accomplished neighbor and fellow-citizen,” pointing to Helen, “is—is another !”

As he spoke, he lifted his mother from her chair, and coolly appropriated it.

“Why, Ned !” she exclaimed, “give me my chair.”

“I can’t, mother ; I want it myself. Here,” drawing her to a seat on his knee, “I suppose I can hold you, since you seem determined to make a great fuss over a trifle ; but it is pretty hard on a fellow to be obliged to hold such a great, overgrown mother when he is all tired out.”

“Well,” she said, making herself comfortable on

her son's lap, "tell us what you did to-night. Can't you see how impatient your father is to hear the details?"

"To begin, five of the boys have promised to use their influence in securing advertising for our paper."

"Ned can think of nothing but advertising," said Grace. "Why didn't you mention the park, Ned? Papa, we have resolved to try to secure ten acres of ground around the Springs for a public park; what do you think of that?"

"A very good idea," said Mr. Conway, approvingly. "Land is cheap, now, as cheap as it ever will be, at least, and Oakwood ought certainly to have a park. But where is the money to come from? The 'Oakwood Transcript'?"

"No, sir," said Ned, "that is a private enterprise. If we make anything out of it, so much the better for us; if we lose, no one else will suffer. The V. I. A.—"

"The what?" interrupted Mr. Conway.

"The V. I. A.—Village Improvement Association," Mr. Conway nodded, "realize that we do something of a favor in publishing a paper devoted to the work of the society."

"They must have been made of stone not to realize it," said Rob, laughing. "Uncle, you ought to have heard Ned convince them that they were underlasting obligations to the 'Oakwood Transcript.' It was brilliant, sir; positively brilliant!" clapping Ned on the shoulder.

"It was business," answered Ned. "At the conclusion of my oration I took in five dollars, which

means ten paid subscriptions, and fifteen promised to subscribe within a week."

"Where is the money to come from with which you mean to buy the park, if not from the paper?" queried Mr. Conway.

"We have a number of plans for raising it," replied Grace. "We are going to have a series of six socials, the first to take place week after next, to which everybody will be invited. We shall try to secure the town hall for the purpose."

"What kind of a social do you have next week?"

"We are not going to tell that," said Helen. "We think it will draw better if it is a complete surprise."

"We must give it a big puff in our next paper," said Ned, "and see if we can't get everybody excited."

"I almost wish we had kept still about it until after the Raleigh girls had given their hop," said Zana.

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"Why, Mamie Raleigh's birthday comes next week, and she intended to have a party, and I had about persuaded her to let us dance in the dining-room," explained Zana.

"And is she going to do so?"

"I think not, now. She said to-night that she believed she should give up having a party and devote all her time to helping get up the social."

Mr. and Mrs. Conway exchanged glances, but made no comment.

"That is the worst thing about this new business," complained Zana; "we have no time for anything else."

"What else do we want?" asked Ned.

"Why, some sort of amusement; we can't work all the time."

"You told me last night," said Rob, "that you have had more fun since coming here than you have had in all your life before."

"So I have," confessed Zana; "but I am afraid this work will not be as amusing as it is now very long. It will seem to be more work than play, and we shall have no time for anything else, and then what?"

"That is Zana all over!" exclaimed Rob. "I've known her to become completely fagged out worrying because she was afraid she might be very tired some time next week! Once I found her crying, and when I asked her what the trouble was, she said, 'Oh, Rob, I am so disappointed! Boo-hoo! boo-hoo-hoo! That party at Mrs. Granville's, next month, wasn't half as much fun as I thought it would be!'"

"Rob Conway! what a stupid fib," exclaimed Zana, petulantly. It was hard for her to submit, gracefully, to the good-natured ridicule which every member of the Conway family might expect at any moment, although she enjoyed heaping it upon the others.

"You see," explained Rob, "she had worried so much for fear she wasn't going to enjoy herself, that she finally became sure of it, and then imagined

it in all its dreary detail until she forgot that it had not yet taken place."

"Laugh, girls!" exclaimed Helen, setting the example, "that was a story to be laughed at ; didn't you know it?"

"Excuse us, Rob," said Grace, and she, too, went off into peals of laughter, in which Zana joined with the greatest satisfaction.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Helen, when the girls could not even pretend to laugh longer, "how late it is ! I must hurry home."

"You'll have to go alone, to-night," said Ned. "I'm holding mother."

"Why, Ned!" said Mrs. Conway, struggling to get up, "aren't you ashamed of yourself!"

"You ought to be ashamed to insist on sitting here," he answered, holding her so she could not move, "when you know I'm dying to walk home in the rain with Helen."

"Miss Helen, may I walk home with you?" asked Rob.

"I should much prefer you to Ned," answered Helen, and they left the room together, after Helen had said good-night to all but Ned, whom she did not notice at all.

In the next issue of the "Oakland Transcript," an entire page was filled with an announcement of the entertainment to be given by the members of the V. I. A. to raise money for the purchase of ground for the park.

Ned arranged the page, with Helen's help, and declared, when it was finished, that if there was any-

one who took the paper and failed to read that page, it would be because he was blind or an idiot. The words, "Come to the entertainment," appeared in capitals, extended across the top of the page; and next, in the smallest letters the office afforded, was the couplet,

" Bring twenty-five cents admission fee
And twenty-five more for whatever may be!"

Then appeared the following remarkable production from Ned's pen :

" We wish we might tell the readers all the details of the wonderful surprise in store for them, or rather those among them who attend this entertainment. We feel that it is not fair to spring so much mirth and first-class unadulterated happiness on you without warning, but we are bound by a solemn promise and several hundred threats to say nothing. Wear your stoutest clothes, and sew all your buttons on with linen thread so that the strongest paroxysms of laughter may be indulged in without fear of the consequences."

Across the lower part of the page was another sentence in capitals: "Come, and bring your friends!" followed by this business-like reminder: "Remember this: the sooner we have raised money for the park, the sooner we shall be ready to attend to the streets of our city."

The older people of the city all seemed disposed to be of assistance. Mr. Conway had a talk with the owner of the property wanted for the park, who agreed to take less than he had been offering it for,

provided the first payment of two hundred dollars could be raised within six weeks.

The Association numbered twenty members, each of whom had paid one dollar membership fee ; but several more young people had signified their intention of joining as soon as they could raise the dollar.

A special meeting of the members of the Association was called to arrange some detail of the entertainment, and Ned told them what success his father had had in their behalf.

“ We have got to raise a sum equal to ten dollars apiece in six weeks’ time,” he said, “ or lose the best opportunity we shall ever have of securing that property. Now, what had we better do about it ? ”

“ It looks like a pretty big undertaking,” said James Raleigh, ruefully. “ I believe we would better give it up, and begin on something easier.”

“ Oh, we can’t give up the park,” exclaimed Grace. “ Someone else will buy that property if we don’t, and cut all the trees down, just as likely as not.”

“ There are other pretty places in the world,” replied James.

“ Suppose we spend our energy in putting a drinking fountain down in the square,” suggested Will Bradley ; “ it will cost less, and we shall not be in so much danger of making a failure of our first venture.”

“ If we make up our minds that we will raise the money for the park, and go to work in earnest, we can do it,” said Ned, firmly, and Grace threw him a glance full of gratitude,

"Everyone can't will a thing to come out just as he wants it to, as you do, Ned," said Zana.

"Of course not, if they flop over like a limp rag and say: 'I want to succeed, but I know I won't, and there hain't no use a-tryin'!'"

Ned looked very weak and comical as he delivered this speech, and Zana felt obliged to fan him with her hat, which brushed his nose quite unpleasantly, "because it is so large!" she explained, with a most innocent expression.

"I read a little story when I was young," said Rob, rising to his feet, and putting on some goggles which he happened to have in his pocket, then looking at the members of the Association in a very grandfatherly way. "I will tell it to you, children, if you will keep still. It had a great influence over all my boyhood days, and did much to make of me the noble specimen of manhood whom you all love and delight to honor."

He smiled as he finished this sentence, crossed his hands over his stomach, and gazed pensively into space. The smile grew broader and broader, until his mouth seemed to stretch from ear to ear, and every vestige of expression left his face. There was no one who could look more like a wooden man than Rob could when he wished to, and those who saw him were usually convulsed with laughter. They certainly were in this instance.

"Don't be so silly, Rob," said Zana, wiping the tears from her eyes, and Rob started as if her voice had aroused him from a pleasant reverie.

"Yes," he said, still grinning, "I will tell it to

you. There were two boys, each of whom had a father. Each father had a potato field, and each potato field was covered with several billions of potato bugs. Each father told his son that the bugs must be gathered and put to their last long sleep ere the golden sun went to rest among his cushions of pink and gold and pale green-blue. Each boy sadly wended forth, with a slow and melancholy wend. Oh, my hearers, it makes my old heart sad to think of that dismal wending!"

"Rob, you shall not be so silly!" exclaimed Grace, but he paid no attention, except to smile with greater expansiveness as he regarded her over his spectacles.

"The boys arrived at their respective potato fields," he continued, in a melancholy drawl, "and being good boys, both knelt and prayed for help. When his prayer was ended, boy number one arose and seated himself under a tree, and waited patiently for the assistance for which he had prayed. But boy number two—little girl," pointing to Zana, and speaking with such sudden energy that he made her jump, "can you tell me what boy number two did? Can't, eh? Why can't you? Have you been dreaming? Are you awake now? Where is your tongue? Why do you laugh? Do you think this is a laughing-school? Listen, children! I am going to tell you what boy number two did. Jumping up, he threw off his coat and said, 'If you kill any more of them bugs than I do, Lord, you've got to git to work pretty quick!'"

"Oh, Rob, that's wicked!" exclaimed Grace, looking very grave.

"Wicked!" repeated Rob, "I'd like to know why? Everyone else seems to see the point." Rob pointed as he spoke to the members of the Association who were all in convulsions of laughter over his story. He had personated so well a certain school-director whom they all knew, but whom Rob had never seen, that it quite overcame them.

"Well, I don't see anything to laugh at, if the rest do," replied Grace, with heightened color. "Such stories may not be exactly wicked, but they sound flippant, and I don't like them."

"If you don't like them," answered Rob, sarcastically, "that is reason enough for suppressing them. It breaks my heart to think that I told a story which you don't like."

Grace's eyes filled with tears, but before she could reply Ned changed the subject by calling the meeting to order, and thus diverted the attention of the others from the disputants. Then he proceeded to give them his reasons for thinking that the Association would better try to secure the property for the park, and soon succeeded in convincing them that there was really nothing else that they so much wanted to do. Ned was so full of energy and enthusiasm that he was always a leader among his companions, without meaning to be.

"We must have an entertainment each week," he said, "and we must make each so interesting that everybody will want to come to the next one. We can do it, if we work together with a will, I am sure.

We must clear thirty-five dollars at each entertainment, in order to make up the two hundred dollars, but what of that? Think how many people there are in Oakwood to give us twenty-five cents admission fee! What do you say, comrades, is it a go?"

"Go with a big G," exclaimed Roger Windom.

"Put it to vote," called a voice from the crowd.

A vote was taken, and Ned's plan was carried without a dissenting voice.

"Now," said Grace, "let us hear what has been done about our first entertainment."

"We have succeeded in getting the use of the hall free of charge," said Roger, who was one of the committee on ways and means.

"The refreshments are not to cost us anything," added one of the girls. "Everyone I asked seemed perfectly willing to contribute. The fathers and mothers of Oakwood act very much as if they were glad to have us take up something in earnest."

Then followed a great deal of conversation carried on in whispers, with occasional exclamations in louder tones, "Won't that be fun!" "That will bring in the dimes!" "There's no doubt that we will have an immense crowd next time. Everyone will want to come when they hear what fun we have!"

When the V. I. A. adjourned that night, there was not a member who did not feel confident that the first payment on the park would be ready in six weeks.

"Come on, Rob," said Grace; "let's you and I walk home with Helen to-night."

Rob opened his mouth to refuse. He was angry with his cousin for having reproved him so publicly, and meant to make her feel it ; but Helen was looking towards him, and he was too gentlemanly to hurt another in his desire to punish his cousin. He turned at once, asked Ned to look out for Zana, and offered his arm to Helen, but took no notice of Grace.

“Aren’t you coming, too ?” asked Helen, seeing Grace hesitate.

“To be sure I am,” she answered, trying to speak as if she had not noticed Rob’s manner, and quietly took Helen’s other arm. “You are going to be escorted home in great style to-night, Helen,” she said, gayly. “Every want of yours shall be promptly attended to.”

“So ? Thanks. I want a hundred dollars, if you please,” replied Helen.

“Certainly, my dear. Just step into the bank, to-morrow, and tell the cashier that I said he was to give you what you want.”

The girls kept up a brisk conversation all the way, and often appealed to Rob, who talked to Helen as if he enjoyed it, but ignored Grace as much as possible. When he could not avoid answering her, he took care to have his reply as sarcastic as he could make it, and he was not deficient in his power of sarcasm.

“The mean, hateful, old thing !” thought Helen, who was always indignant when Grace was hurt ; but she was too diplomatic to interfere in any way, and tried her best to introduce some subject so interesting that it would cause Rob to forget his griev-

ance. She guessed that Grace was sorry she had spoken so quickly, and had planned the walk home with Rob as a sort of peace-offering.

“Poor Gracie!” she said, as she bade the cousins good-night, and watched them walking down the street together, “she will be frozen stiff by the time she gets home, if she goes all the way with that icicle.”

“Rob,” said Grace, when they had closed Helen’s gate behind them, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” asked Rob, with an air of surprise.

“That I spoke to you as I did, to-night, before the V. I. A.,” she answered, bravely.

“Oh, don’t give yourself any uneasiness on that account! I assure you I enjoyed it.”

“Rob, please don’t talk that way; it makes it so hard for me to explain.”

“I beg your pardon; I had forgotten that this is an instance where you, only, should be considered.”

“What can I say to you? Why will you talk so?”

“Have I blundered again? Please permit me to be silent the rest of the way home. It will be safer.”

“Rob, you may think you are a gentleman to talk to me in this way; but let me tell you that you are not.”

“That is no news from your lips, I believe.”

“You may call it gentlemanly to meet me with sarcasm, when you know I wish to apologize for having unintentionally hurt you; but I do not.

I should despise Ned if I thought he would treat anyone as you treat me to-night."

"Don't think it, then ; Ned could never hold up his head again, if you should despise him for half a minute."

Grace laughed, a little nervously.

"I haven't made matters any better by that last remark, have I," she said.

There was no reply, and she continued, somewhat hastily :

"In spite of your sarcasm, I am going to say what I started to. I don't like stories which seem to make light of sacred things, and I can't help saying so ; but I think I had no right to say so to you before others, especially in the way I did say it. I am very sorry, Rob, and I don't blame you at all for being hurt about it."

Grace hesitated, not knowing whether to say more or not. She hoped he would tell her that she was forgiven, and then things could go on as before ; but he acted as if he had not heard her. He was whistling softly, and when they reached the door, he opened it for her, then passed upstairs without even bidding her good-night, or pausing, for a second, in his music.

Grace stopped at her mother's door, thinking to go and talk this new trouble with the one who always found some way for her out of every difficulty ; but the light was out, and Grace knew that her mother was in bed, and ought not to be disturbed.

"Oh dear !" she thought, " why must I always blunder ? I do wish my tongue would keep still

when it ought to. I am always doing more harm than good in the world."

She was nearly ready for bed when she was startled by a light tapping on her door.

"Who is there?" she asked softly, so as not to disturb Zana, who was asleep.

"Come here a minute, won't you, Grace?" asked Rob.

Hastily donning a wrapper, she went into the hall, wondering what could be the trouble. Was Ned sick, or what was it that made Rob's voice tremble so?

"What is the matter, Rob?" she asked, alarmed at his pale face, and the serious look in his dark eyes.
"Is Ned——"

"Ned is all right." There was a little pause; then he went on hastily:

"Grace, I'm a perfect brute! I ought to be thrashed for acting as I did to-night. I—I—ahem! you didn't say anything so very bad. Good-night!"

He kissed Grace on the forehead, and before she could speak, disappeared into his own room.

"I wonder," thought Grace, with a happy little laugh, "what Rob is sorry for; telling the story, or being sarcastic? I don't suppose I shall ever dare ask him. Somehow I don't seem to understand my cousin Rob very well."

She would have been somewhat surprised had she known that it was the first time in Rob's life that he had confessed to being sorry for anything he had done or said. He told himself, when he was safe in his own room again, that it had been a hundred

times worse than having a tooth pulled ; but he was not sorry he had done it. He knew, though no one else did, that there was not a person in the world whose good opinion he would rather have than that of his cousin Grace, and that he should never tell another such story, or aim to speak lightly of that which should be held sacred.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHERE is Grace?”

The question had been asked by different members of the family, all of whom wanted her assistance; but no one had seen her since she finished her morning’s work.

“I wonder if Grace can be sick,” thought Mrs. Conway, as she put her own room in order. “It is unusual for her to disappear in this fashion. I must hunt her up.”

“Are you alone, mamma?” asked a voice from the doorway at that moment.

“Oh, Grace, is it you? Where have you been all the morning. I have worried about you.”

Grace entered the room, closed and fastened the door, then deposited the great bundle which she had brought with her on the nearest chair.

“Mamma,” she said, separating the bundle and taking from it an old fur-lined circular cloak, “I found this in the cedar chest in the attic; may I have it?”

“What can you want of that old thing?” asked Mrs. Conway. “It was worn out long ago.”

“Why are you keeping it?” asked Grace in return.

“I did not know but I might find a use for it sometime.”

"I can make use of it now."

"What use?"

"I should like the fur lining."

"It is moth-eaten."

"Not badly. See? There are quite large places where it is as good as new, and it is very nice fur."

"What do you want of it, Grace?"

"I was thinking that I might fix over my old plush cloak with it," replied Grace, with a nervous little laugh.

"Have you decided to use your cloak money for Helen?"

"Nearly decided; not quite. I haven't said anything to her about it, yet. I am afraid I am selfish enough to want to see how my old cloak looks, first."

"How have you thought of altering it?"

"Why, you see, mamma," Grace took up the cloak to show her mother, "it is too narrow for me, but the fronts are without darts. I thought I could make a vest of the fur, and take off the fastenings, and cut out the armholes a little more. That would give me enough room across the chest, and make it a little larger across the shoulders."

"Quite an idea, Grace! You can put a band of the fur across the bottom, and have fur collar and cuffs."

"It won't look new, of course," continued Grace, "but it will be warm and will look much better than it does now. I think it would be better to have Miss Green come for a day, don't you? She will charge two dollars, and I think I can afford that."

"I should hire her if I were you. The work will be more satisfactory, and she may know how to freshen the plush. Gracie, dear, you are thinking of making quite a sacrifice."

"Yes, mamma."

"You know your auntie has written to ask if you may not go home with Zana."

"I know; am I going?"

"You are to do as you like about it."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just what you want to do, dear. I think the change will do you good; but you know we cannot afford to dress you as Zana dresses."

"I know you do everything you can for me, mamma."

"I was wondering if your poorer clothes would make your visit less pleasant?"

"Don't worry about that, mamma," replied Grace, gravely. "I'll think it over before I decide, and I shall try not to be silly."

Grace took the old plush cloak and the fur-lined circular into her arms, and went to her own room.

Zana had gone with Rob and Ned into the country for fresh vegetables, and she had the room to herself.

Spreading the cloak on the bed, she stood looking at it, until her eyes filled with tears, and a little frown came between her brows.

"It's horrid to be poor," she exclaimed, "and I hate it! I hate this old every-day sort of existence, I hate patching and piecing and making over; I hate everything. Why can't everybody have enough

money to live on decently? It doesn't make people better nor braver nor wiser nor anything that they ought to be, to oblige them to live on just about half what they need. I wish I were a boy; I'd become rich if I never did anything else."

She walked to her dressing-table, and idly picked up a picture which lay there, and examined it, carelessly at first, then earnestly. It was an excellent cabinet photograph of Helen, taken just before her father died. Her calm eyes seemed to look straight into Grace's troubled ones, and tell of a steadfastness of purpose, and a patience that made Grace ashamed of her petulance.

"They were richer than we, once," she thought, "and now I suppose Helen would feel as if she had nothing to complain of if she and her mother had half as much. Nothing to complain of! When did anyone hear Helen complain! But then, she is an angel. I can never be half as good as she is."

"And yet," whispered conscience, "you are tempted to forsake her for Zana, whom you know is not so worthy of your love and respect."

Grace dropped the picture and walked to the window, where she seemed to be intent on trying to count the blossoms on a goldenrod bush which Ned had planted in the yard.

"Yes," she said, finally, as she turned away from the window, "that is just about what it would amount to. I should be forsaking Helen for Zana. I never railed at poverty as I did just now, before I listened to Zana's foolish reasoning. If Zana had not come it would not be so very hard to wear that

cloak another winter. Now, since I have heard her criticisms, I know that it will be very, very hard—one of the hardest things I have ever tried to do, and I hate myself for being so silly. I almost wish I had never thought of helping Helen! I don't believe anyone would ever think of helping me——”

Grace paused, suddenly, and the color crept slowly over cheek and brow.

“I should never be worthy,” she said, suddenly. “I am too selfish. I think of everything from my own point of view. I might try to help my mother just as much as Helen tries to help hers; but I should not do it so cheerfully. I presume that I should never forget for an instant how good I was to help her instead of allowing her to do it all alone!”

Grace spoke with intense sarcasm, then laughed merrily. One of the sudden changes to which she was subject had taken place. The complaining spirit had taken flight at the first appearance of the strong, helpful spirit which usually had possession of her.

“That is just you, Grace Conway,” she said, dancing to the mirror, and shaking her plump little fist at her own reflection, “and if you are not careful, everybody will know you as you know yourself! Now, your first duty is to fix this thing so that there can be no backing out. You are not to be depended upon, unless you are fastened so you can’t get away.”

Grace ran lightly through the hall, humming a little tune, and Mrs. Conway smiled when she heard her coming.

"She has decided," she whispered to herself, and her eyes filled with tears that almost hid their smiles. "God bless my precious little daughter."

The door was pushed open with Grace's usual energy, and the young girl bounded into the room.

"I'm going to do it, mother," she said.

"Going to do what?" asked Mrs. Conway, as if she did not know. She wanted to give Grace a little more time.

"Going to lend my cloak money to Helen for an indefinite length of time, and wear my old cloak another winter."

"What about your visit?"

"I haven't decided, yet. I suppose I shall be governed by circumstances."

Grace laughed, and tried to look as if she did not care much whether she went to the city, or not.

"What do you mean by circumstances? Zana's approval or disapproval of your wardrobe?"

"I'm afraid you have guessed it, you shrewd little mamma. I don't expect Zana's approval. She is not satisfied with her own dresses, and how could I expect her to like mine which are ever so much plainer? I don't mind a little of her disapproval, mother, but if she should criticize me a very great deal I think I would rather stay at home."

"Your cloak is the shabbiest part of your wardrobe; a good cloak costs more than any other garment, and would do much towards making you look well dressed."

"Mother, what is it you are thinking? I don't understand you."

“I am not trying to influence you, dear, or to make you change your mind ; I only want you to think well before you act. I am older than you, and I know that you are not setting yourself an easy task.”

“Don’t worry, mamma ; having put my hand to the plow, I shall not look back, at least for more than a minute at a time. You see, it is just this way : I can see more clearly than I could before Zana came, what a hard life Helen has before her unless she is given a little help, and there is no one to help her but me. Helen is superior to Zana and to all the other girls who snub her on account of her mother’s occupation, but I can’t make hardly any of them believe it. Mamma, there must be a large number of silly people in the world, if what Zana says is true. Do you believe that ladies who are worth considering would snub Helen ?”

“I think Helen’s position will make a difference with a great many nice people, Grace. I fancy your old cloak will help you to a little painful experience in that line before spring, especially if you go to the city.”

“Well, it can’t hurt forever,” replied Grace, stoutly, “and Helen will have to suffer as long as she lives unless she is helped. She is always so patient and cheerful : I shouldn’t feel half so sorry about her if she would act more as I do when things don’t go to suit me.”

“Helen is certainly a very fine girl. My heart has ached for her many times, since her father died, especially when I have seen how quietly she bore the pain caused by others’ thoughtlessness.”

"I'm going to help her, mother; and now I think I'll go over and have a talk with her about it. I've said it, now, and you've heard it, and that is as good as a promissory note, signed, sealed and delivered. Good-bye, mammy; I'll be back in time for dinner."

"Come here, dear!"

Grace was just disappearing through the door, when she heard her mother call her.

"What is it, mamma?" she asked, returning immediately.

"I only wanted to say that I am very proud of my dear, unselfish little daughter!"

"Don't call me that, mother," replied Grace, hiding her face on her mother's shoulder. "I'm not unselfish, but I try to be. If you knew all I have thought this morning, you wouldn't have a very high opinion of me."

The washing had been lighter than usual that morning, and, to Grace's great delight, it was swinging on the line when she reached her friend's house, and Mrs. Dayne was in her own room resting.

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Grace, when Helen had explained; "now I can have you all to myself for a little while."

"We haven't had one of our nice, confidential visits in a long time, have we?" said Helen. "Do you know, Grace, I have been almost jealous since Zana came."

"I'm awfully glad to hear it! I shouldn't want you to be just as happy when you could not see me so often. I like to think how much I miss you!"

A little silence followed that speech, which both girls understood perfectly.

"We might come over oftener than we do," continued Grace, "but it doesn't seem quite the same when there is a third party, and of course I can't leave Zana."

"I was thinking of that, just to-day," answered Helen, "about our liking to be alone together. You and I are like a couple of sentimental lovers, Grace. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves for being so silly!"

"We are," Grace promptly responded, and both girls laughed.

The friendship between these two was very beautiful, lacking none of the warmth of the usual girl-friendship, but having a firm foundation in principles that less thoughtful girls could not comprehend. They understood each other thoroughly, and each was sure that the other represented the highest type of girlhood.

Ned often declared that he had caught them, on several different occasions, visiting together without speaking a word.

"There they sat," he would say, "staring at each other as if they could not turn their eyes, under penalty of death, and pretty soon Helen would reply to something that Grace had thought; then there would be another mournful pause, and Grace would reply to one of Helen's thoughts, and so it would go on, and the listener would have no more of an idea of what they were talking, than the man in the moon."

It seemed, to day, as if Ned's raillery might be

based on fact; for, after a long period of silence, Helen said with a smile:

“Well, Grace, what is it?”

“Helen, why don’t you study wood-engraving?”

“What put that question into your head, just at this moment?”

“Have you been thinking of it, too?”

“All the morning. Wouldn’t Ned laugh if he could hear that? I have been wishing,—Oh, Grace, you don’t know how I wish that I might take lessons!”

Helen arose quickly, and began to pace the floor, a habit of hers, when she wished to exercise self-control in a more than usual degree.

“How much do you suppose it would cost?” asked Grace.

“More than I can ever have to spend in that way, I fear. There is a place in New York where instruction is given to girls free of charge. Don’t say anything about this to mother, will you, Grace? It would worry her to know how I long to take lessons, and she has enough to worry her now. I often think if this life is hard for me to bear, what must it be for her!”

“You ought to fit yourself to help her more than you can by taking in washing,” said Grace. “She can’t do washing always, and you are not so strong as she is.”

“I know that. It frightens me, sometimes, when I think of the future; but what can I do? It seems as if mother and I were fated to go round and round in the same dreadful path, day after day, and

every day we wear it down a little deeper. Pretty soon we shall have two straight walls, one on either side, and they will be so high that we cannot so much as see what is going on over our heads. They are so high now that it seems impossible to climb to the top, where we might find some pleasanter rut to travel in. There ! I've complained my little complaint and I hope you will forgive me ! I'm not a bit sorry, however, for telling that wonderful story. I feel ever so much better now it is off my mind. You remember how Mark Twain got rid of a troublesome rhyme by telling it to someone else. Now you may have the feeling, for a day or two, of trotting in a little circle ! By the way, is there any news about the entertainment ? ”

Grace roused herself. All the time Helen had been talking, she had been so busy with her own thoughts that she scarcely heard her.

“ Any news ? ” she repeated. “ Oh ! I'm not thinking of the entertainment, just now.”

“ What are you thinking about, I wonder. I don't believe you heard one word of the pretty, mirthful story I told you.”

“ How did you learn about that place in New York, Helen ? ”

“ The drawing-teacher told me. I asked him, one day, just out of curiosity, how much it woul ! cost a girl to learn wood-engraving. He replied, ‘ Only the fare to New York, and board while there.’ Then he told me of a boarding home for young women where I could get boarded for about three dollars a week. It was foolish of me to ask him,

when I knew I couldn't go ; for ever since I have been obliged to do battle with the blues. You can't think how glad I was to see you coming alone, Grace. I never needed you more than I do to-day."

"Helen, can you guess what I came for? Ned would have another laugh if he knew how our minds have run in the same channel, for the last few days. You have got to learn wood-engraving, Helen ! I came over on purpose to lend you fifty dollars, and——"

"Grace, are you crazy?"

"Not a bit. I thought of putting the money out at interest until I have saved enough for a bicycle——"

"Grace!"

Helen spoke reproachfully, and covered her friend's mouth with her hand.

"Tell it just as it is, please, Gracie. You want to help me, by lending me some money. Where does this money come from? What do you propose to do without?"

"It is money I have saved from my allowance, Miss Independence. That is the truth. I might buy a number of things with it, which I don't need, and don't intend to buy. That money, my dear child, forms the beginning of my private fortune. Are you satisfied? Seriously, Helen, I want you to use it and pay me when you can."

"I can't do it, Grace ; don't tempt me. What if I should take it, and never be able to pay you? No, no ! You are just as good as you can be ; but please don't say another word about it."

Grace did say a great many words, however, and being possessed of persuasive powers nearly equal to Ned's, she finally succeeded in talking Helen over to see the matter in the same light she did.

The two friends were busy making plans, when they were interrupted by Ned, who reached through the open window, and took a firm hold of his sister's back hair.

"Hurry!" he shouted, "if you want to ride home with us!"

"Oh, Ned, you pull! I don't want to ride home with you."

"So? Well, you're going to have that pleasure. Hurry!"

"How did you know I was here?"

"Saw you through the window. It is nearly dinner time. Come on!"

"Ouch! Ned, don't pull so!"

"If your head follows my hand, there will be no pulling to complain of."

"But I can't climb through the window."

"Yes, you can. You would do it quicker than a cat if you wanted to throw a pitcher of water into my face."

"But, Ned! everybody will see me."

"I know it, dearie. Everybody saw me this morning, when I sailed out of the house with a towel pinned to my coat-tail. Revenge is mine, sweet sister."

"I'll get through the window, love,
Out to meet your brother, love;
Come, my darling, when we're alone.
We'll tell what we know about joking!"



"Don't sing, Ned," begged Grace. "I'd rather go two blocks on my hands and knees than hear you do that."

Grace crawled through the window as gracefully as she could, and waved her hand to Helen.

"I'll see you again, very soon," she said.

"I should think so!" exclaimed Ned. "Aren't you coming over to work on the paper, this evening, Helen?"

"Yes; Grace meant——"

"Oh, I know now what she meant! mooning; mumbling; mind-reading; coddling; bah!"

Ned made a wry face, doffed his hat, and bowed low as if he were seasick, then joined Grace and his cousins, who were occupying the only seat in the light wagon.

"Where am I going to sit?" he asked.

"You might trot behind," suggested Grace.

"We have no other little dog," added Zana.

"Rob, will you sit there and hear me abused like that!" exclaimed Ned, tragically.

"Never! Speak, me lord! How shall I avenge thee?"

"Just lend a hand. These girls are to be seated on the bottom of the wagon-box, while you and I, their masters, ride in comfort on the seat."

It was useless for the girls to protest. They were lifted over the back of the seat, and placed in the bottom of the light wagon; then the boys appropriated the seat, and Ned drove the horses home on a run, while the girls wished for cushions and a sudden eclipse of the sun.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS GREEN, the village tailoress, had come and gone, and Grace turned round and round before the mirror in her mother's room viewing the effect of the made-over cloak from every position.

"It doesn't look as bad as it might!" she said, at last, in a tone of satisfaction.

"It looks very much better than I thought it would," replied the mother.

"The sleeves are creased at the elbow, but I don't believe they will be so very noticeable, and the worn places under the arms won't show unless I raise my arms over my head. I believe it will do to wear to Zana's. At any rate, it is much nicer than the cloak Helen is going to wear to New York."

"Isn't Helen going to get anything new to wear to New York?" asked Zana, appearing in the doorway.

"Where did you come from?" inquired Grace, wondering how much of the conversation her cousin had heard. "I thought you were out for a walk."

"It is too chilly to go walking: I decided to wait awhile. So that is your new cloak! Turn around, slowly, so I can see how it looks."

Zana eyed it critically, determined to take her time

and find something to say in praise of it. She had heard all Grace had said, and was resolved that the cloak should not prevent her cousin from going home with her.

"It looks like a different cloak, Grace," she said, finally. "That fur vest is really becoming and pretty."

Grace blushed with pleasure, and Zana congratulated herself on having said just enough and not too much.

"By the way," she continued, going back to the first subject, "is it really true that Helen isn't going to have anything new to wear to New York?"

"That is what she says," replied Grace. "I do wish she could afford to get a new dress, at least, but she thinks she cannot."

"She will be laughed at by everyone who sees her. She is positively shabby."

"She has had very little since her father died."

"I wonder if she would take something of mine?" asked Zana. "I have ever so many more dresses than I need, and I should like to give her one or two. I'm going to ask her——"

"Better not," interrupted Grace. "I shouldn't dare to, and I know her better than you do. Helen is very proud, and she is the most independent girl I ever knew. She would feel so hurt that she would never forgive you."

"But, Grace, she can't go to New York looking so—so like a beggar."

"Helen couldn't look like a beggar, even if she were dressed in rags. She says if she does not care

more for her lessons in wood-engraving than for what folks may say of her clothes, she might better stay at home. She thinks it would not be wise to borrow money with which to buy clothes."

"Perhaps she doesn't care so much as girls in better circumstances about what people think."

"Zana Conway, what are you saying?" Grace turned quickly, and looked at her cousin with flashing eyes. "Do you suppose that Helen ceased to be human when her father died? One would think, to hear you talk, that money gave a person every mental and moral characteristic worth having, and that all took wings when the money did!"

"I don't think that, of course," replied Zana, "but I do know that money makes a difference. It is hard to explain it, so that it will not sound harsher than I mean it. I realize that girls whose fathers are richer than mine have pleasures that I know nothing of, and so don't miss: but if I had been accustomed to having them, then I would find it hard to do without them. It is just so about everything else."

"Your argument will hardly hold good in this case," said Grace, "for it has not been many years since Helen had more than you have now. Yet you and a great many others seem to think that because she is poor now— But what is the use of talking! I can't think of it without being angry!"

"I suppose I am to blame," said Zana, good-naturedly, "but I really cannot understand your feeling for Helen, although I try to. Perhaps it is because I don't understand her very well. I am sorry for her, of course, and would do anything

I could to help her ; but I could never feel towards her as I do towards the girls in my own set."

" You might love her as dearly as I do, if she wore a silk dress," thought Grace, but she was wise enough not to say so, knowing that it would do no good, and changed the subject by exclaiming :

" Isn't it nice that we have such fine weather for our entertainment ! I do hope we shall have a crowd."

" Ned thinks there will surely be a hundred," replied Zana. " That will be twenty-five dollars admission fee, besides——"

" Hush ! " exclaimed Grace, " mamma will hear ! "

" Don't you wish you knew how much mamma has heard ? " asked Mrs. Conway, smiling.

" Oh, mother ! have you heard anything ? " asked Grace.

" We have tried to be so careful," added Zana.

" But mother has the sharpest ears ! What have you heard, mother ? "

" Masks ; ghosts ; weird music ; screen," began Mrs. Conway, then looked at the girls as if there was a great deal more that she might tell if she chose.

" She knows everything ! " exclaimed Zana, in a tone of great disappointment, and for a moment Grace looked equally miserable ; then catching a gleam of amusement in her mother's eyes, she suddenly exclaimed :

" Oh, Mother Conway, you're just guessing ! Don't worry, Zana ; mother has tried that trick on me, before. She has heard a few words, and thinks she will get us to tell her everything, and then laugh

at us. Confess, you deceitful mammy ! Am I not right?"

Grace was shaking her mother, and tumbling her hair, and patting her cheeks, and poking her fingers into her ribs, and acting more like a frolicsome kitten than a girl of sixteen, and Zana watched her with the expression of surprise on her face that was always there when she saw Ned or Grace treating their mother with such familiarity.

"My!" she thought, "what would my mother say if Rob and I should treat her that way? I fancy we shouldn't care to try it more than once."

Then she began dreaming of a nice home which might have been theirs, had her mother been more like Aunt Marie. She had indulged in a great many such dreams since coming to visit Grace, and this time the dream was so pleasant that she hardly heard Mrs. Conway's laughing confession, or Grace's announcement that she "was not to be fooled any more by such a scheming mother."

"Doors open at eight o'clock," read the printed admission tickets which had been prepared for the entertainment, but long before that hour, the members of the V. I. A. gathered in the hall to receive the expected guests.

The writer lacks words to give a description of that entertainment which would do it justice; but an attempt will be made, since some of the readers might otherwise think themselves defrauded.

When the guests entered the hall, they were startled, at first, by its ghostly appearance. It was draped in white from ceiling to floor, with not one

spot of color to relieve the monotony. Tall figures in white paper caps and long white gowns flitted about the room, but not a loud word was spoken. As each guest entered the room, he was handed a card on one side of which was printed :

GHOST SOCIAL WITH VARIATIONS.

On the other side was the word, "Silence," and beneath it, this warning: "Anyone speaking or laughing aloud, before refreshments are served, will be required to pay a fine of five cents."

All the lamps were covered with blue shades, over which were thin shades of white, and the light shining through them produced an effect which the young people pronounced beautiful, and the older ones called horribly dismal.

A small dressing-room had been made by a partition across one corner of the hall, and into this no one was allowed to go. When it seemed as if there would be no fresh arrivals, the most blood-curdling music that could be invented by the members of the V. I. A. came from this dressing-room to harrow the nerves of the guests. "The only thing in its favor," whispered the guests to each other, "is that it seems to be muffled."

Soon, however, it seemed to escape from its prison, and the hall was filled with discordant shrieks, and the sound of quarrelsome cats, and various mournful noises that were enough to drive a person not possessed of nerves of iron, to the verge of distraction. The guests glanced towards the door leading into

the smaller room, as if meditating an attack ; but suddenly the following announcement appeared above it, in white letters on a black background :

“CHORUS OF GHOSTS.

“ It will grow worse until the sum of five dollars has been placed in the box fastened to this door.

“ THE OUTER DOOR IS LOCKED AND YOU CAN’T GET OUT.”

The door was locked. It was a masterly stroke on the part of the V. I. A., for their music would have driven the last of their audience out of doors. As it was, the fathers of Oakwood, led by Mr. Conway, whispered together, for a few moments, and concluded to humor the audacious members of the V. I. A. for once, and five dollars was soon deposited in the box. The music ceased instantly, but was immediately succeeded by the deafening tones of a huge cow-bell. A stage had been built near the door leading into the small room, and was hidden from the audience by a large white screen. When the bell, which was held by some one behind this screen, began ringing, the lights were suddenly lowered, and the guests saw on the screen these words : “ Be seated, please ; you are to be entertained.” Then they knew that the bell was intended to call their attention to the screen, and immediately found seats.

A tall figure in white stood beside the screen, in full view of the audience. He held a cane in his

hand, which he waved in the air over his head, in what he meant to be a most impressive fashion.

“Arise, ye ghosts!” he commanded, “the midnight hour draws nigh.”

Immediately there appeared on the screen shadows of many persons in long draperies, who seemed to spring up from the floor.

“Shadow pantomimes!” exclaimed Mr. Conway, “and Ned is to explain.”

“Five cents fine, sir!” said a melancholy voice, and one of the figures in white stood beside him with outstretched hand.

“I thought you ghosts were all behind the screen,” said Mr. Conway.

“Five cents more!” exclaimed the melancholy voice, and everybody laughed, silently.

“Here! take a quarter, and let me say what is on my mind,” exclaimed Mr. Conway, desperately, handing out twenty-five cents. “Can’t we say a word until this show is done?”

“Not until refreshments are served, except in whispers,” replied the ghostly individual, as he hurried away to another part of the room, to collect a fine from a man who had been imprudent enough to laugh aloud.

The shadows on the screen had been darting back and forth in wild confusion, but were now indulging in a very lively dance.

“These merry sprites,” explained the individual with the cane, “are ghosts of the fierce Indians who used to inhabit the region around Oakwood. They have just heard that there is talk of making great im-

provements in our little village, and they are now met to consider how best to prevent it. They do not take kindly to civilization. Ye people of Oakwood! Do you wish to live like the red man in the forest? Do you also object to advancement? Do you consider fine pavements, drinking fountains, a beautiful park, shaded streets, et cetera, et cetera, indefinitely, of no importance compared with—with—compared with——”

“Filthy lucre!” prompted a ghostly companion in a stage whisper that brought a smile to every face in the audience.

“Compared with the advantages which may be procured by the judicious expenditure of a little money,” continued the first speaker. “If so, keep on in the path you are treading. Heap up your gold; tramp through muddy streets; cut the noble trees around the Springs into firewood; bow before wealth, and let the ghost of this warlike tribe trample your love of the beautiful into the dust.”

“I thought you spoke of mud, just now,” ventured Mrs. Conway.

“Five cents, please!” A hand was immediately extended before her.

“Ask Mr. Conway for it.”

“Five cents more, please!” said the same voice, in an aggravating monotone.

“Keep quiet or you’ll have a heavy debt hanging over me,” whispered Mr. Conway.

The ghosts of the departed Indians had left the scene, and in their place could be seen a woman bending over a washtub and a man sawing wood.

“Here, my friends,” explained the speaker, “you see an illustration of the spirit of the rising generation. How thankful you should be that you are permitted to be so closely related to such a generation! Rather than have our village remain in its present period of stagnation, we would saw wood and take in washing,—figuratively speaking, you will understand,—that we might raise the necessary funds to give it a higher place in the scale of advancement. My friends, there is a hint in that picture on the screen which you cannot afford to overlook. Take my disinterested advice, and spend your money freely here to-night!”

“Business and Ned Conway are synonymous,” said a man in the audience, an opinion which cost him five cents.

A dozen of the pantomimic scenes were explained by the lecturer, who never allowed himself or his audience to forget the object for which the social was given; then an invitation was extended to those who were hungry enough to care to purchase refreshments, to seat themselves at long tables in an adjoining room, and the audience was informed that talking was no longer considered a misdemeanor punishable by fine!

The dining-room was arranged to look quite as ghostly as the other room, and silent figures in long white gowns stood ready to wait upon the tables. Beside each plate a bill of fare was placed, headed with the announcement that refreshments would be served on the European plan.

"The young people do nice work on that new press," said Mr. Brown, examining his bill of fare, critically.

"I was afraid you would not think so when you saw the way in which your advertisement appeared in their paper," replied Mrs. Conway.

"I was a little vexed, just at first," said Mr. Brown, laughing. "A dealer in furniture does not care to advertise very extensively a commodity of that sort."

"I must thank you for the way in which you received Ned's explanation. It did him more good than a dozen lectures. My boy is a little too fond of playing practical jokes."

"Do help me order my supper!" exclaimed Mrs. Dayne. "I was never so puzzled in my life."

There was a hearty echo of her sentiment around the table, to the great amusement of the waiters. This bill of fare had cost the young people considerable work, and when finished was a source of great satisfaction. Here is a copy of it:

No. 1. Dear W. H. Beat.....	5 cts.
No. 2. C. E. H. Cat, wire me off!.....	5 cts.
No. 3. Lump-ice, cubs-reck.....	2 cts.
No. 4. Mad Helboi.....	3 cts.
No. 5. Mike Dace can race.....	10 cts.
No. 6. Sh! Lima N. K. Mud.....	5 cts.
No. 7. Bad Anna D. robbed wren's beak.	10 cts.
No. 8. Lime T. Kews.....	5 cts.

"Ten cents to the person who will translate this

thing!" called Mr. Conway, but no one accepted his offer.

"Give me No. 6, please," said Mrs. Dayne, finally, placing five cents into the hand which was immediately outstretched to receive it.

"Must we pay in advance?" asked Mr. Brown.

The waiter nodded, and hurried away to fill Mrs. Dayne's order.

Immediately a huge placard appeared before the guests, bearing the information that no one would be served until all orders were in.

"It is worse than highway robbery!" growled one gentleman; but his eyes twinkled so merrily that everyone knew he was not so vexed as he wished to appear.

The waiters now came forward with pencils and paper, and made memorandums of the orders as fast as given, and very soon the guests were served with a selection of viands that surprised them and caused no little amusement.

Mr. Conway had ordered a dish of everything on the bill of fare, in order, he said, to be sure to have as good as the house afforded, and before him were arranged dishes containing wheat bread, coffee with cream, cucumber pickles, boiled ham, cake and ice-cream, mush and milk, baked beans and brown bread, and sweet milk.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Dayne, "how was I to know that No. 6 meant mush and milk?"

"Don't you like it?" asked a gentleman on her right?

"Not the least little bit."

"Suppose we trade. I have secured two slices of white bread as a result of ordering No. 1, and I prefer mush and milk."

The exchange was made, and other guests, who could not re-arrange the transposed letters in the bill of fare followed their example, and for a time the spirit of trade seemed to have taken possession of them.

After refreshments, there were a few tableaux, a speech by Rob which was acted instead of spoken, and a little comedy acted silently, then the audience dispersed, feeling as if they had been very well entertained.

"How much have we, Miss Treasurer?" asked Ned of Winnie Percy, who had been appointed treasurer of the V. I. A.

"A clear profit of forty-five dollars!" she replied.

"Three cheers for the V. I. A." shouted Ned, and everyone, even the girls, responded with enthusiasm.

"I believe they had a good time," said Helen.

"There's not the least doubt of it!" answered Rob.

"We can get up an entertainment which will be ever so much more fun," said Grace. "We must have something new every time, or people will stay at home, you know."

"Have you something new in mind?" asked Willard Brown.

"Something that will take pretty well, I think," she replied, "but I'll not explain now. Ned, won't you call a meeting of the members of the V. I. A. at the editorial office, for to-morrow night? We

ought to make plans for the next social at once, so as to have plenty of time to prepare."

The announcement was made ; then the young people went to their several homes, happy in the belief that they should have no difficulty in raising money for the proposed park.

CHAPTER X.

AT the next meeting of the V. I. A. after the plan which Grace had in mind for the second of the series of socials had been discussed and adopted, Ned rose and said :

“ Ladies and gentlemen, it becomes my painful privilege——”

“ Painful privilege is excruciating, my dear sir ! ” interrupted Grace.

“ Mr. President,” Ned bowed to Rob, who had been unanimously elected President of the V. I. A., notwithstanding the ludicrous manner in which he had first filled the office of chairman, “ will your honor oblige the members of this association by requiring the vice-president to hold her tongue ? ”

Zana was on her feet in an instant.

“ Mr. President,” she said, “ Mr. Ned Conway has no authority to speak for the members of the V. I. A. so far as our beloved vice-president is concerned.”

“ Vote ! Vote ! Put it to vote,” called voices from different parts of the room. A vote was taken, which resulted in a tie ; for there were as many girls as boys in the room, and the former voted for Grace, while the latter voted for Ned.

"Let there be impressive silence in this room for half an hour," said Rob with great gravity, "while I consult the authorities on this momentous question."

He opened the copy of Webster's unabridged dictionary, pored over it for a moment, then consulted several volumes of agricultural reports, a song book, and an almanac, all with the utmost seriousness, apparently, and all the while the amused members of the V. I. A. kept perfectly quiet. Rob's original way of filling the president's chair afforded them continual delight.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Rob, finally, as he adjusted the blue goggles, which he kept for important occasions, "it has been decided by the one man whom I acknowledge as my superior, that, in questions like the mighty one now before us, the offending party must hold her tongue half the time, and Miss Grace Conway will accordingly oblige us by imposing the strictest silence on that unruly member of her makeup, for the time specified."

"Your honor," said Ned, "if I understand the full import of that decision, it means that but half of any sentence may be spoken by the culprit, and that all the long words must be parted in the middle. Am I right, most noble sir?"

"Perfectly correct," replied Rob, almost choking in his endeavor to keep from laughing. "Will Mr. Ned Conway kindly favor us with the remainder of his interesting and highly instructive discourse?"

"It becomes my painful privilege——" repeated Ned, with a defiant glance at Grace.

"There are some idiots who can learn," mused Grace, by way of interruption.

"Silence in the court-room!" commanded the president.

"Your honor," retorted Grace, "it is my painful privilege to speak half of the sentence, and worse might have been said, and yet——"

Grace took her seat without attempting to finish her sentence, and the girls applauded so vociferously that the hisses of the boys were scarcely heard.

"It becomes my painful privilege," repeated Ned, undauntedly, "to announce the proposed absence of one of our most honored members."

Ned paused to take a drink of water, first brushing an imaginary mustache away from his lips, and the members of the V. I. A. looked inquiringly at one another. They could not decide whether Ned were joking, or if someone were really going to leave.

"A great undertaking is never carried to completion," continued Ned, "without severe losses, great inconvenience, and much sorrow on the part of those engaged in it. Had it not been for the object to which we, as members of the V. I. A., have met here to further, this loss, inconvenience, and sorrow could not have come to us."

"Mr. President," said Winnie Percy, "I move that Mr. Ned Conway be required to tell his news in fewer words."

"The motion of our respected, but misguided treasurer must be set aside without being put to vote,"

decided Rob, "being so weak as to appear ludicrous should it be entered on our records. Mr. Secretary, I beg that you will forget that you heard the request of the treasurer. Mr. Conway, pardon the interruption, and proceed with the discourse."

"To make my meaning quite clear to you, ladies and gentlemen," continued Ned, "I must take you back to the time when this association did not exist. Not to stay, however; do not think that I would ask you to tarry long in such a benighted state of civilization. I simply wish to give you a running start, which shall enable you to jump over a few preliminary discussions, and land on both feet in the office of the 'Oakwood Transcript,' just before the first issue is ready for the public. You will see two choice spirits standing before a printer's case, absorbed in a study of this great problem: 'How may advertisements be set most attractively?' Like whispered tones of inspired voices came the thought, 'By means of illustrations.' But how print the illustrations? There are many fine artists among us, but no wood-engraver. Finally one of the choice spirits said to the other, 'Ned, dear, I wish I might learn wood-engraving!'"

"She never said anything of the sort!" exclaimed Helen.

"That," continued Ned, taking no notice of the interruption, "that, my friends, is the little seed from which has sprung the great resolution. In just one week our esteemed citizen, Miss Helen Dayne, the second of the choice spirits to whom I referred, will start for New York city, where she

expects to learn the art of wood-engraving. Our honored president will now direct proceedings."

Rob arose as Ned took his seat, and pulled a huge red bandanna handkerchief from his pocket.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we will shed a few tears over our great loss!"

He then set the example by weeping at the top of his voice. Every boy in the room joined in without further invitation, and the noise they made was horrible. Rob wrung his handkerchief, spread it over the back of a chair as if to dry it, and took another from his pocket. Ned did likewise. Soon these handkerchiefs hung beside the others, and each of the boys drew a third one from his pocket. These were followed by some fine silk handkerchiefs which the girls had worn around their necks, under their cloaks. By this time most of the girl members of the association were laughing so heartily that real tears ran down their cheeks. It was plain that Rob and Ned had planned beforehand to take the members of the V. I. A. by surprise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Rob, when the last handkerchief had been placed on the chair-back, "we will now give three cheers for Miss Helen Dayne, the young lady who has the courage to brave the dangers of an unknown country in search of information."

The cheers were given with great enthusiasm.

"And now," continued Rob, "the young lady who is to enjoy the delight of a season in New York city will receive the congratulations of her friends,

and for that purpose this meeting will be adjourned without further ceremony."

"Is it true?" asked the young people, gathering around Helen.

"It is true that I am going to New York," she replied; "but what I want to know is how Ned and Rob found it out? Girls, did you——"

"I didn't even know of it, myself!" interrupted Zana.

"And I never mentioned it," added Grace. "Boys, how in the world did you get your information?"

"We are clairvoyants," replied Ned. "We are not obliged to wait for information until you see fit to impart it."

"You are just as mean as you can be!" replied Grace, indignantly.

"Why so, my little lamb!" asked Rob.

"Because you have spoiled all our fun!"

"Instead, we have substituted one form of enjoyment for another. You had planned a sort of surprise party, where Helen was to receive the good wishes of her friends. We planned this! Could anything have gone off better?"

"But I wanted to be the one to tell of my good fortune!" protested Helen.

"My child," replied Ned, "it would not have been proper. Madam Grundy would have been shocked. This is a matter requiring careful handling; it could not have been broached successfully except by men of rare and mature judgment, such as is possessed by Rob and myself."

"How did you learn of it? Please tell," said Helen.

"Tell you our secrets when you refused to take us into your confidence!" exclaimed Rob. "Impossible. You decided that no one should know, except yourself and Grace—even poor Zana was left out—and now you have the assurance to demand our secret as if you had a right to it."

Grace and Helen were vexed, but the whole affair was so ludicrous that they could not appear as offended as they wished. They had been very careful to mention the subject before no one but Mrs. Dayne and Mrs. Conway, thinking to give all the young people a great surprise. They could not believe either of the mothers had told their secret, but how had Ned and Rob got hold of it! It was a puzzling question and the boys were highly delighted over their perplexity.

When the members of the V. I. A. had dispersed, Grace and Ned found themselves alone in the office.

"Did you see how skillfully I managed to send Rob and Zana with the Raleigh girls," asked Ned.

"I noticed your efforts in that direction," replied Grace, quietly. "Ned, how much do you know?"

"More than most persons of this generation, I believe," replied Ned, with a mischievous light in his eyes.

"How much do you know about Helen's new plan?"

"Nearly as much as you do, I fancy. Why could you not have admitted me into your confidence, Grace? How long is it since you began to think me unfit to be trusted?"

"Why, Ned Conway! What a way to talk!" Grace stared at her brother in astonishment. It had not occurred to her that he would care particularly to know her plan for Helen, or that he might feel as if he had not been treated fairly.

"I wonder if you would be pleased, Grace, were I to have secrets from you?"

"Why, no; not if they amounted to anything."

"Is that it? You can wear your old cloak and make any number of sacrifices for another, but I must not be allowed to help or even to know anything about it. It seems to me that I have a right to know such things."

"Have you a right, Ned?" asked Grace, earnestly. "If it only concerned me, there would be no doubt about it; but it concerns Helen, and she is sensitive. Does Rob know?"

"Only so much as I told him, nothing about the cloak."

"How did you find out?"

"Put two and two together half a dozen times," replied Ned, with a laugh. "I began to have suspicions when I saw your old parasol, and heard that someone had sent money to Helen for drawing-lessons. When I saw you fixing over your cloak, my suspicions were aroused again, and I said to myself, 'something will happen before long!' Then I heard Helen say, one day, 'you must be sure to send me word every week while I am away; ' and I saw you motion to her to be careful, or I should hear. So one thing led to another, and yesterday I heard Mrs. Dayne tell mother that it did not seem possible that

Helen was to leave for New York in one week. I had heard her talk about the Cooper Institute there, and how much she wished to go, and nothing more was needed. I communicated to Rob and we formed our plans. He had happened to hear you and mother wondering if you could get ready for a surprise party next Wednesday, and we knew at once why the party was to be given."

"What a detective you would make, Ned!" exclaimed Grace, admiringly.

"I prefer to confine my talents in that direction to the family circle," replied Ned. "Grace, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because of Helen, for one reason," replied Grace.

"Give another reason. I see there is one."

"It is not easily given, Ned."

"Why not?"

"It—it makes me appear to praise myself," replied Grace, with a blush. "Please, Ned, let us drop the subject."

"You dear, generous, little sister! Do you think I am going to let you be the only unselfish daughter of this house? Not if I have to be half a dozen daughters myself!"

Ned spoke half in earnest, half in fun, as he often did when deeply affected; but he had thrown one arm around Grace and was caressing her with a tenderness quite unusual to even his affectionate nature.

"It does not seem an unselfish thing to do now everyone knows of it," replied Grace. "I shall

always feel, now, as if I wanted others to know all the while."

"You little goose! No one knows but me, and I shall not tell. I'm going to help you, however."

"Oh, no, Ned! Helen is so sensitive!"

"Helen need know nothing about it. No one need know but just you and me."

"It can't be so," replied Grace, quickly. "I should not be happy one minute, Ned, to seem to do more than I am doing."

"But if no one is to know——"

"I shall know. Besides, there is mother——"

"Yes, here is mother? What about her?" said a pleasant voice, and Mrs. Conway laid a hand on the head of each child.

"Darlings," she said, softly, "mother sees her prettiest picture, now. God grant that my children may never be less closely united. What were you talking about when I came in?"

"Mamma, Ned has found out about everything! I never saw such a boy."

"He must be remarkable to find out about everything, at his age."

"Everything about Helen, I mean, and the cloak and the surprise party."

"I'll teach folks to keep secrets from me!" exclaimed Ned, pinching his sister's ear.

"And he insists on paying part of Helen's expenses——"

"Keep still, can't you!" exclaimed Ned.

"No, sir, I cannot. Mamma must know everything. Mamma what ought I to do?"

"She ought to listen to me, ought she not, mother?"

"What do you propose, Ned?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"To pay one-half the sum that Grace has advanced with which to pay Helen's expenses, and go without something. If Grace can afford to dress shabbily I surely can, having such an advantage in natural beauty——"

"Silence, young man!" Grace held her hand-kerchief over Ned's mouth. "Listen to mother."

"Grace cannot very well explain to Helen, Ned——"

"Why should she?" interrupted Ned. "This is a little business which will concern only us."

"You know, Ned, I have only lent the money to Helen."

"Very well; then I'll lend half the amount to you. You may give me a note payable when Helen pays you."

"I think that would be fair, Grace," said Mrs. Conway; "and if Ned wants to help, he surely should be given the privilege."

"Mother, ought not Grace to tell me when she thinks of doing anything like that? Why shouldn't I know about it as well as you?"

"Would you take Grace into your confidence to such an extent, my son?"

"You know I would, mother. I tell her everything."

"But Ned," said Grace, "I did not want to ask you to deny yourself——"

"You might have said so," interrupted her brother. "I think I should have understood. Try me, hereafter, please, before jumping to a conclusion that I should not."

"Ned, you make me appear just as if I thought myself more unselfish than anyone else."

"I don't know what you think; but you have expressed my thought of you pretty well. That is absolutely the last compliment I shall pay you, young lady! I should never have thought to help Helen; but I am glad you thought of it, and I don't want you to get so far away from me that I can't have the benefit of your thoughts."

Grace put up her lips for a kiss. "You are the nicest brother in the whole world!" she said, softly, then ran to help her mother, who had left the room some moments before, quite sure that her children could arrive at a satisfactory decision without any help, except what they found in their love for each other.

CHAPTER XI.

THE entertainment which Grace had planned was called a "Dickens Social." The young people had been obliged to work very hard to get ready for it, but it proved even more successful than the first had been, and the members of the V. I. A. were accordingly in the best of spirits. There were few of the residents of the village who had not become interested in the V. I. A., and also in the little paper, which was so full of enthusiasm on the subject of village improvements. At first there were few who believed the young people could raise the money with which to purchase the property for the park; now, there were few who doubted it.

"People are so interested," said Rob, "that I believe they would attend any sort of entertainment given for that purpose, let it be ever so poor."

"We'll always give them their money's worth, for all that," replied Ned, "and they'll have to acknowledge it; we are not beggars, but business-like individuals."

The Dickens Social was the last of the entertainments which Helen expected to attend for some weeks. The next day Grace went over to help her pack her trunk, and to have a good old-fashioned visit with her, uninterrupted by the remarks of a third

party. All four of the Conway young people were to escort her to the depot in the evening, but the two friends decided that their real, good-bye talk must be had alone.

"I didn't think it would be so hard, Grace, dear," said Helen, seating herself on the floor beside her half-filled trunk and clasping her hands over her knees. "If mother and you could go, too—"

"We'll keep until you return!" interrupted Grace, with a light laugh.

"Mother isn't strong," replied Helen. "She never complains, but I can see that every day she finds it harder to do her work."

"It is dreadful for her to be obliged to do such work!" exclaimed Grace. "It is because of her, Helen, that you ought to be glad instead of sorry that you are going to New York."

"I am glad, but I can't help but think of poor mother here all alone. Grace, what would she do if she were to be taken sick in the night, without me to help her? It does not seem right for me to leave her alone."

"I wonder if she would allow me to sleep here?"

"I think not. She says you have already done too much. Grace, my dear friend, do you suppose I don't know what the made-over cloak means?"

"You think you do, I presume," replied Grace, demurely; "but you are not half so wise as you might be! If you think I am making any great sacrifice on your account, please dismiss the idea at once, for I am not." Grace was glad, now, that Ned had insisted on helping, because she could say this

with greater truthfulness. She was too generous to want another to bear a load of indebtedness because she had been able to give a little assistance. "I do hope, Helen," she added, quickly changing the subject, "that you will learn rapidly, so as to relieve your mother as soon as possible."

"And yet, Grace, you don't know half what she has been obliged to endure. The hard work, so different from that to which she had been accustomed, has not been half so hard to bear as the cruelty of some who used to be glad to call themselves her friends. Then the anxiety regarding the future. I didn't know half how dark life looked to her, until you made it possible for me to go away to study. I think I could not have decided to leave, had I not known how much relief the idea has given her. She has talked to me very freely since then. I have always loved my mother dearly, Grace, but I sometimes think I have not known half how noble she is! I wish she had allowed me to share more of her sorrows, as well as her joys; but her generous heart could not bear that I should have more care than that which naturally fell to my lot in our altered circumstances, and she has kept much from me that I should have known."

The conversation left both girls unusually serious, and their leave-taking at Helen's door showed none of the girlish sentiment which characterized that at the depot a few hours later.

"If you shed a tear," said Ned, threateningly, "we will wipe it away before the crowd! Rob, you watch Grace, and I'll keep an eye on Helen."

The boys had prepared for this bit of nonsense, and immediately began pulling so many handkerchiefs from so many different pockets, that a smile of amusement came into the faces of the spectators in the little waiting-room, which swelled into a hearty laugh when Ned drew a towel from his vest, and took his place beside Helen.

“Boys, behave yourselves!” commanded Grace, in a low tone. “You are attracting attention.”

“So were you,” said Rob, “when you hung on each other like babes in the woods! Let go of Helen’s hand, Grace! If you don’t you’ll be sorry.”

“Don’t pay any attention to him!” said Zana. “I don’t believe he dares do any worse than he has done.”

“Don’t he, though?” Rob took Helen’s other hand and held it with an air so ludicrously sentimental that a wave of laughter again went round the room.

“Rob, let me alone,” said Helen, trying to disengage her hand.

“When Grace drops your other hand,” replied Rob, coolly. It is needless to add that Rob won his point.

The train came puffing in. Rob caught up valise and lunch basket and rushed into the car. Ned caught Helen by the arm and hurried her out of the waiting-room without allowing her to kiss the girls good-bye, and in two minutes she was whirled away out of sight. The through trains seldom stopped long at the little village, and the boys were never more pleased, for they had decided that it would be

better for all concerned if they could manage to prevent a "scene!"

When Helen found time to collect herself, she discovered a box of candies on the seat beside her, marked "Compliments from Rob," and a copy of Tennyson's poems, on the flyleaf of which was written, "To Helen, from Ned."

"Dear, thoughtful boys!" she whispered. "They are awfully annoying, sometimes; but they do much to make the world joyous!"

"I am not going home, just yet," said Grace, as her companions turned away from the depot. "You go on, please."

"Are you going to see Mrs. Dayne?" inquired Ned.

"Yes."

"I am glad. She must be feeling very lonely. If there is anything I can do to help, be sure to offer my services."

"Grace thinks of everyone but herself," said Rob, when she had left them.

"Did you ever see a girl like her!" exclaimed Ned, proudly.

"I never did."

Zana listened, and a feeling of envy crept into her heart.

"Everyone loves Grace and praises her," she thought, "but if I were to do just as much as she does, no one would take the least notice. It is easy to do nice things when one knows they will be appreciated."

Zana's great complaint, both to herself and to

others was that she was not appreciated as she should be, yet she could not see that the trouble really lay in herself. She had an exaggerated idea of her own good qualities, although she did not make herself offensive by saying so. If others did not accept her at her own valuation, according to her way of thinking, they were to be blamed and she was to be pitied.

CHAPTER XII.

AT the close of the sixth entertainment given by the members of the V. I. A., an informal meeting was held in the office of the "Oakwood Transcript."

"We have just two hundred and thirty-seven dollars," said Ned. "That will leave thirty-seven dollars after making the first payment on the park property. We have another payment of one hundred and fifty dollars to make, and then the land is ours. Shall we apply the thirty-seven dollars on that payment, or put it into the bank until the rest of it is raised?"

A vote was taken, and it was decided to put the money into the bank, and continue the weekly entertainments, at least until the holidays. It was now the tenth day of November.

"I think our entertainments will be popular," said Grace, "as long as we can manage to have something different each time. We must keep everybody curious. Should we be obliged to repeat one entertainment, I believe we should have a much smaller attendance at our next."

"It seems to me," said Roger Windom, "that it is about time for the members of this association to ask the proprietors of the 'Oakwood Transcript' to render a bill for services."

"Put that in the form of a motion," suggested Willard Brown.

"No, you don't," exclaimed Ned. "The proprietors of the 'Oakwood Transcript,' which, by the way, is the best paper published this side of the Rocky Mountains, don't want pay for what they have done."

"It isn't fair to make you do so much more than the rest are doing," protested Nellie Raleigh. "It must cost a great deal to get out that paper, and we could not advertise our entertainments half so well without it."

"The business manager of the 'Oakwood Transcript' is proud to say that the paper is paying its own expenses!" replied Ned.

"Does it pay you for your time, also," asked Nellie.

"Not yet, but it will, soon."

"What we do is only fun!" interposed Grace. "Ned and I have always liked editing papers, even when the printing had to be done with our pens; but we like it very much better, now that we have a purpose; so, you see, we are to be envied, not pitied."

"You are at least entitled to the gratitude of the rest of the association," began James Raleigh.

"If you think so," interrupted Ned, "persuade your father to advertise!"

"Ned believes in deeds, not words," said Mamie Raleigh, with a laugh. "I am with you, Ned, in that respect, and I'll give father no rest until he pays for advertising space in your paper."

"I don't know but I might do a little work in that direction," said Roger Windom. "I do not seem to be able to help much anywhere else. If the paper is necessary to the work of this association, and I help the paper, why isn't that just as well as to stand around at an entertainment where I'm always in the way?"

"You are awfully in the way when there are nails to be driven, and decorations to arrange, aren't you, Roger?" asked Grace.

Roger blushed with pleasure, and, for a little while, forgot to be awkward and ill at ease. He was very bashful, and could not take a creditable part in the entertainments; but his services were quite indispensable when preparations for them were to be made. Grace had the happy faculty of knowing just how to put awkward people at their ease. Such a faculty brings more friends to a girl than the ability to play difficult music, or to embroider, or paint pictures, or dance, and it seems strange that there should be so many girls who do not consider it worth their while to try to develop it.

To the young people of Oakwood, it seemed as if the weeks had wings, so quickly did they disappear. Rob and Zana were to have gone home in November, but were granted permission to stay with their cousins until after Christmas. The last of the series of entertainments was to be given on the twenty-second of December, and on the twenty-sixth they were to return to the city, accompanied by Grace and Ned.

In the columns of the "Oakwood Transcript" the

following notice appeared : " We regret to be obliged to inform our readers that a great disappointment is in store for them. It is one which might, possibly, be averted, did it seem best to have it so ; but disappointments are good for us all, in that they develop human character and prevent it from growing lop-sided with gratification. So, dear readers, try to take the bitter dose as you would take disagreeable medicine, which you know to be a sure cure for baldness or obesity ! Here it is : The ' Oakwood Transcript ' will discontinue publication during the month of January, while the editor and business manager seek relaxation from the cares of business in the whirl and gayety of city life. They promise, on their return, to send out a paper so much better than any yet issued, that the readers cannot help but realize that their loss has really been to them a great gain. This is as good a place as any in the paper to make the announcement that no more entertainments will be given by the members of the V. I. A., until the evening of the fifteenth of February. In the name of my co-laborers, I extend thanks to all who have attended our entertainments so regularly, and given up so much of their wealth without a struggle. It has been a source of great joy to us that we were not obliged to use force to extract the dimes, as we had fully decided to do, had we found ourselves unable to obtain them by any other means. We believe there is not a person in this village who will not rejoice to hear that the park property is paid for and has been formally accepted by the village council. The V. I. A. has seventy-five dollars in the

bank towards the village improvements which they contemplate making, and of which more will be said in future numbers of this paper. Subscribe at once for the best paper ever printed ! Only fifty cents a year ! You cannot afford to live without it !!! No home is complete, no office is furnished, that does not receive its regular visits. If business is dull with you, you may be confident that it is because you have not advertised in the 'Oakwood Transcript.' I say this in a spirit of the purest disinterestedness. 'Homo sum ; humani nihil a me alienum puto.' If you are in doubt as to the meaning of that last sentence, rest assured, had it never been put in the back part of Webster's Dictionary it could not have graced this column, and you may easily translate it :

"NED CONWAY,
"Business manager of the 'Oakwood Transcript.'"

Grace had tried to convince Ned that his leading article, as he called it, would be improved by some changes ; but in vain. Ned insisted that it was a triumph of journalism, and must be printed without revision. Following Ned's article was one from Rob's pen, which we will copy:

"We are about to rend the ties which bind us to the 'Oakwood Transcript.' We, means my sister and myself. The ties mentioned are invisible. The rending will not be accompanied by sound. Its effect will be tremendous. We hope, however, that the paper will not suffer long in consequence. We

know that we shall be missed, for the countenance of the writer is not easily forgotten, and Zana has the honor to be his sister. We humbly ask your forgiveness for any action on our part that may have given offence ; knowing that all will agree that there is nothing to forgive. We thank you for the pleasure you have given us during our stay here and hope we may meet again at no distant day. In conclusion, it is but fair to state that, if Zana knew this was being written, and her name would be signed to it, it is barely possible she might insist on having it worded differently. ‘Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.’ That is a sentiment which is deeply rooted in the hearts of yours truly,

“ROB and ZANA CONWAY.”

A box of Christmas gifts arrived from the city a day or two before Christmas, and was taken in charge by Mrs. Conway. On Christmas Eve, Rob and Zana hung up their stockings for the first time in nearly six years. The members of the V. I. A. had been invited to an informal progressive party, where every game the house afforded was made to do duty. There were “authors,” “dominoes,” “backgammon,” “checkers,” “tiddley-winks,” “fish-pond,” and a host of others. The party was divided into couples, and drew slips of paper from a box, to decide at which table the different couples must begin to play. The victorious parties at each table progressed to the next, and there was a general change of partners. After playing at every table, the winning couples shot at a mark with a little

parlor pistol having a rubber-tipped arrow, to see who could make the best record. There was plenty of variety, and any amount of fun, and the evening passed so quickly that everyone was surprised when Mr. Conway announced that it was time for prizes to be awarded to the two who had made most progressions, as well as to the unfortunate couple who had made fewest. Simple refreshments were then served, and the guests departed.

Then came a merry half-hour in which the different members of the Conway family decided where their stockings should be hung.

"You must remember, children," said Mr. Conway, "that my present to you went into the printing-press."

"We remember," said Grace; "but we also remember that mamma's did not."

"Let us be thankful for that!" exclaimed Ned, standing back to view his socks, both of which he had hung to a chair-back, directly over a large, pasteboard box, on the inside of which was written: "For the overflow."

"Wouldn't it be sad, Ned, if those nice large socks of yours should be as empty in the morning as they are now?"

"Don't mention it, Grace! The very thought makes me weep. Mother, relieve my anxiety; have you something to put into my stocking?"

"Yes, my son."

"Bless your dear little heart! Would you mind telling me the initial letter?"

"I can tell you the entire name ; it is a darning-needle."

There was a shout of laughter at Ned's expense, which he feigned not to hear. Lifting his mother into his arms, he carried her to a closet, and shut her in.

"You may remain there," he said, sternly, "until you are sorry for having hurt the feelings of your only son."

"I am sorry now, Ned," she replied.

"Sure ?"

"Oh, very sure !"

"It is wonderfully kind in me to let you out so soon," he said opening the door. "You must be very careful, madam, for it is not at all likely that I can let you off so easily another time."

The happy family then made themselves comfortable for their usual Christmas Eve talk :—Grace perched on her father's knee, Ned and his mother on a sofa near them.

"Sit closer to me, mother," he said, throwing one arm around his mother's shoulder. "Now, Rob, there is plenty of room for you and Zana on this sofa beside us."

Mrs. Conway took Zana's hand in hers, and began at once to tell a pretty German story of the Christ child, which she had committed for that purpose. Mr. Conway had a Christmas poem to recite, and so did both the children ; then all joined in singing Christmas carols, after which a delightful hour was spent in earnest conversation about the life of Christ, what it was meant to teach, and how each had found it helpful during the past year.

When Rob and Zana went to bed that night, they were conscious of an influence of a more uplifting nature than anything they had ever known, and a little feeling of self-pity that they could not be more intimately connected with a home-life so beautiful as that which their cousins enjoyed. The next day was one long delight to them, and they confessed to their cousins that it had been the happiest Christmas day of their lives.

"I never before realized," said Zana, "how much of beauty belongs to this day. Rob and I go to church regularly, but for all that I do believe we are but little better than the heathen. There have been times when we have actually dreaded the approach of Christmas, because we could not send as expensive gifts to our acquaintances as others in our set were enabled to do."

"A beautiful plant has started to grow," thought Mrs. Conway, "but I fear it will be neglected in the life of frivolity to which Zana is returning. I wish I might keep her here a little longer."

"I think it is wicked to give presents in that spirit," replied Grace. "We give only to the poor, or to those whom we love very dearly. If we wish to make a present to an acquaintance, we do so on a birthday or some other anniversary, but never on Christmas. Mother," she said, suddenly changing the subject, "is it in order for me to try on my new cloak once more?"

As Grace asked the question she whirled around to display her fine new astrachan to the best advantage.

"Why do you ask when you already have the cloak on?"

"Simply that she might know whether she is out of order or not," said Rob.

Everyone was very indulgent on this occasion, and quite happy over Grace's childish delight in her new cloak, which, with a muff to match, were found fastened to her Christmas stocking, bearing a card on which was written: "With best of Christmas wishes to Grace from Mother, Ned, Rob, and Zana."

"I must make a little confession, children," said Mrs. Conway. "Your father remembered his promise not to buy any Christmas gifts for you, but he gave me more money than usual to spend as I pleased."

"Of course he did!" exclaimed Grace. "That is just like papa. Ned and I will have to publish so fine a paper when we come home, that he will be glad every minute to think he bought the printing-press."

"Oh dear!" groaned Ned. "If father could only remember to do simply what is for our good, we should be relieved of a great deal of exertion! Now we must try extra hard to acquit ourselves creditably. Father, you are unjust and unkind to keep us forever under bonds of gratitude."

The father smiled, and placed his hand caressingly on Ned's shoulders, and a look of perfect confidence passed between them.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the morning of their departure for the city, the members of the V. I. A. went to the depot in a body, to bid the four young Conways good-bye.

“Don’t be gone long!” they said to Grace and Ned, “or we shall stagnate!”

“Dear children,” began Ned in the most fatherly tone he could command, “it pains us to be obliged to leave you, even for a little while; but we do it only for your good. Oakwood will, one day, be a great and flourishing city, in need of the improvements that are the pride of similar cities; and how can its representative paper, the ‘Oakwood Transcript,’ speak intelligently of needed improvements if its editor and publisher know nothing of the improvements made in other cities? It has just occurred to me, dear children, that, had you been as public-spirited as you should be, you would have offered to pay all our expenses, as a slight token of your appreciation of the cause which takes us away from you.”

“Convince us that you go for no other reason than our good, and we may yet make the offer,” replied Nellie Raleigh.

“All aboard!” shouted the conductor. The boys

helped their sisters into the car, and obliged them to do their leave-taking through the open window.

"We have dedicated our lives," exclaimed Rob, "to an attempt to crush sentimentality in the female sex."

"Bring Rob and Zana back with you!" called Willard Brown to Ned.

"Especially Zana!" added James Raleigh, at which there was a merry laugh among the teasing young people, who had not failed to take note of Willard's partiality for Zana's companionship.

There were a few hasty words of parting which might have been spoken before, but were not; which need not have been spoken at all, but were. Then came an almost deafening ringing of engine bells, above which could be heard the cheering of hearty, boyish voices. The train moved slowly away from the little depot, the crowd of merry faces, the waving handkerchiefs disappeared from view; faster and faster the familiar rocks and hills and trees rushed past the car window, and soon Ned and Grace were looking with eager eyes for evidences that they were really travelling away from home out into a new and untried world. To Rob and Zana, who had seen many of our large cities, this twenty-four hour ride to Chicago, was thought of only as a somewhat disagreeable task, to be lived through as comfortably as possible, and they were inclined to regard Ned and Grace in a manner quite patronizing. They could not understand their cousins' eager delight in all that was passing around them, nor the curiosity which kept them continually watching for bits of

scenery different from anything they had ever seen. Rob and Zana had become travellers at so young an age that they could not remember when they had been curious about anything.

"Let us pretend that we are travelling in Rome," suggested Grace.

"Can't; there is no snow in Rome," replied Ned.

"That is a fact, my dear. I did not mean Rome at all, but Greenland."

"All right. I see an iceberg sitting on this side of the car, next to the front seat."

"Oh, Ned, that is mean! Let us mention places, not people."

"I am deep in the study of human nature just at present," answered Ned. "I am seriously thinking of writing a serial story for the 'Oakwood Transcript.'"

"You write a serial story!" Grace spoke quite scornfully. "I should like to read it when it was finished."

"You shall have the privilege. I will give you an extract now. On the left side of the parlor car sat the young couple. The reclining chairs were drawn so closely together that not one tender word could drop to the floor between them; so closely together were they drawn that the cooing occupants thereof might feel the beating of each other's heart——"

"How can that be, Ned?" interrupted Grace. "Is his heart on the left side, and hers on the right?"

Ned stared in amazement.

"Grace," he said, "you are on the brink of a great discovery! Dare you go further? Think well before attempting it. My novel was worded after the

pattern of other novels, therefore it cannot be wrong. Cooing couples are always represented as being heart to heart, and no one, before you, has thought to investigate."

"Ned," said Zana, "you are horribly silly."

"Zana rushes to the defence of the novelists!" exclaimed Rob. "I wonder, Ned, if I could catch a glimpse of that couple without appearing to stare?"

"You can. Their sweet faces are turned towards the front end of the car. She rests her head on his shoulder, and one great scarlet ear is doubled up in consequence. His arm is around her corset. It is a picture which Zana would call 'too awfully sweet for any use,' if the motion of the car did not disturb it so cruelly."

"I presume they are married," said Grace. "'Just wait, Ned, until you have a wife, then we will see—'"

"When that time comes, age will have made you too blind to see anything; but if I had a hundred wives, I wouldn't act so silly as that fellow does! I should think people would have more self-respect than to make such a spectacle in public."

"Do you think it is a case of sour grapes with Ned?" asked Zana of Grace, pretending to speak confidentially.

"I'm afraid it is. Poor old Ned!"

"What's that?" demanded Ned.

"Nothing, Ned; nothing at all," replied Grace, soothingly.

"Will you take it all back?" he asked, clasping the fingers of one hand around her neck.

"Ned!" she whispered. "Don't attract attention."

"Will you take——"

"Yes, yes! anything, if you will only behave yourself."

"Really, Ned," expostulated Zana, "you must not romp now."

"I should like to know why not! Is not Grace my sister, and what else are sisters good for?"

"We are not in a little country village, now; we shall soon be in the city, and city young people do not romp as you have been in the habit of doing."

"Do I understand that, for the next month, I am to go around as if I wore a strait-jacket?"

"Why, of course not. We are going to have lots of excitement while you are with us, but it will be of a different kind from that to which you have been accustomed."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Ned through his nose, and looking as boorish as possible. "We are to be shown the lions, I suppose. Lawk-a-daisy! Won't it be great!"

"Ned, what does possess you!" said Grace.

"I was just thinking," he replied, a sparkle of mischief in his eyes, "that while you and I were seeing the lions we might return the favor by giving them an unvarnished view of rusticity. I think I'll be a cowboy while I'm in Chicago; you know I can command a beautiful yell, and the way I whistle through my fingers is truly marvelous. Have you forgotten, Zana?"

Ned placed both hands to his mouth, as if he

meant to give an illustration of his accomplishments, but Grace quickly pulled them away.

"Ned," she said, softly, "please don't. Zana is really annoyed, and I don't wonder at it."

"Forgive me, Zana!" exclaimed Ned, quickly. "I only wanted to tease you a little; why should you be more teased to-day than you would have been yesterday?"

"Because the circumstances are different," replied Zana, looking out of the window to hide the angry tears in her eyes. "I almost know you will do something to shock my friends while you are in Chicago, just because you would rather tease me than to eat."

"Pshaw, Zana, you are silly!" said Rob.

"I may do something to shock your city friends," replied Ned, laughing, "because I have never been a city friend myself, and consequently do not know what is expected of me. Could you not give me private lessons, Zana? How far back must I stick my right foot when I bow; or does the left foot go back while the right supports me? If you will teach me I'll agree——"

"Ned, please don't," whispered Grace.

"I'm horrid, Gracie! I'll be good, if I have to hold my tongue between my thumb and finger from here to Chicago."

"Paper?" inquired the news agent, at that moment.

"Have you the 'Oakwood Transcript'?" asked Ned.

"Never heard of such a paper."

"I read no other literature," said Ned, putting his purse back into his pocket.

Zana was obliged to smile, notwithstanding her very evident desire to keep serious, and the momentary unpleasantness between them was forgotten.

“Twenty-two hours since we saw mother!” exclaimed Grace, the next morning. .

“In about two hours and a half we shall be at home,” replied Rob.

“Zana, aren’t you very glad?” asked Grace. “I have just been thinking how nice it will seem to me, in a month from now, to see papa and mamma and the dear old home again.”

“I believe she is already beginning to be homesick!” exclaimed Zana, and she and Rob laughed merrily; but Ned gave his sister’s hand an affectionate little squeeze.

“I am not homesick,” protested Grace, “and I would not go back if I could, until my visit is over; but I can’t help thinking how lonely papa and mamma must be without us. Ned and I have not been away from home for one night since we visited grandpa and grandma nearly five years ago.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE four young Conways alighted from the hack, and ascended the steps leading to the front door of one of the houses in a stylish row of tenements.

“Here we are!” exclaimed Rob, ringing the door-bell.

Grace looked about her curiously. “Not a blade of grass or an inch of dooryard,” she thought, “and the neighbors crowding close on every side! It stifles me.”

“Anything,” thought Ned, who was also taking mental notes, “anything but to live in a house tied to half a dozen houses like a row of paper dolls. I don’t see how a fellow living here can tell whether he is himself or one of his neighbors!”

Our friends had plenty of time for their mental criticisms, for Rob was obliged to ring more than once before the door was opened. Finally, however, they were confronted by a domestic of sullen demeanor who let them in after having first observed them through the partly-opened door.

“Oh!” she said, in a tone half apologetic, half resentful, “it is you, is it? I thought it was an agent or something. Agents get around very early nowadays!”

"Did you not know we were coming?" asked Zana, severely.

"I didn't think about this being the day. I had other things to think about."

The girl started kitchenward, flinging this last remark over her shoulder, but Zana called her back.

"I did not excuse you, Martha," she said. "Where is mother?"

"Down town."

"And Aunt Sara?"

"In bed with toothache; mustn't be disturbed."

"That is all, Martha; you may go."

Zana spoke pettishly, and Martha gave her a look in which there was little love, before turning away.

"Come, Grace," continued Zana, "we will go to my room."

"And we will go to mine," said Rob to Ned.

"I suppose," added Zana, "that we shall have the pleasure of meeting our affectionate relatives when we go down to luncheon."

"Why, Zana!" expostulated Grace, "what a way to speak of your mother!"

"What a way my mother treats me!" retorted Zana. "She is not like your mother, Grace, as I have often told you."

"Don't you love her? Honestly, Zana, you act as if you did not."

"Oh, I suppose I do," admitted Zana, flushing. "I should not want her to be sick or in trouble; but I can't feel towards her as you do towards Aunt Marie. There are too many times when she aggravates me beyond telling."

Grace looked at her cousin in silent astonishment. How different she appeared from the fun-loving girl who had visited at Oakwood. "I suppose," she thought, "that Zana is grieved because no one appeared to meet us. It is a chilly home-coming for the poor child; but I am sure some very good reason must have taken Aunt Eveline away."

In the next room Rob and Ned were also talking of the mother's absence.

"You must not think," said Rob, "that no one will be glad to see us because no one is here to greet us. We are not demonstrative here, but we have considerable affection for one another, notwithstanding. At your house you make more fuss over the return of a member of the family who has been gone one day, than we should over the return of one who had been absent six months."

"I understand," replied Ned, pleasantly. "So much fuss is not necessary to life——"

"But it is very pleasant!" interrupted Rob. "I did not know how pleasant until I went to your house."

"If I am to believe all that the fellows who visit me say, there are not many homes like ours!" replied Ned, with a happy laugh. "I am pretty well satisfied with it, anyhow."

As Ned spoke, he took from his trunk a framed photograph of his mother, which he pressed to his lips and then placed upon the table.

"Did you bring that!" exclaimed Rob.

"Why not? I have been used to it at home, and I need it ever so much more when I am where I

cannot see the original. That, my boy, is the picture of the nicest woman in the world!"

"What a sentimental old fellow he is!" said Rob. "One would think you were raving over a sweetheart."

"Fiddlesticks!" Ned curled his lip disdainfully. "Find a sweetheart as nice as my mother is," he said, "and I'll rave over her as long as you want me to. You can't find her, so I'm safe in promising."

"Doubly safe," replied Rob, "for you would never need to make the promise. When I find any one like your mother I shall do the raving, and you will know nothing about her. Seriously, Ned, I do think you have the nicest mother in the world. That surprises you, doesn't it? Remember that I have not said my mother is not nice. She is very attractive and lovable, and I am proud of her; but I think she is not quite so motherly as Aunt Marie."

By the time the young people had arranged the contents of their trunks, and had made themselves presentable, after their ride on the cars, the bell rang to call them down to luncheon.

Aunt Eveline was waiting in the sitting-room to receive them.

"Very glad to see you, my dears," she said, kissing her children, and giving a cold little hand to Ned and Grace. "It is not necessary to ask if my young people enjoyed themselves, after having read their letters," she continued, speaking to no one in particular, "so I'll turn my attention to my nephew and niece. My dears, will you pardon a little seeming rudeness on my part?"

"It will be easy to pardon whatever you may wish us to," replied Ned, gallantly.

"Bravo, Ned!" exclaimed Rob with laughing eyes. "You will be a courtier in no time!"

Zana saw that the criticism that lurked in her mother's eyes had been dispelled by Ned's reply, and felt more at ease than she had since that young man had announced his intention of assuming the rôle of cowboy. She had feared that her mother might take a dislike to Ned, and that he might discover it, which, in addition to her many superficialities (which Zana did not call by that name, but which she recognized and was sure Ned would notice), she was almost sure would arouse the love of teasing that Zana considered Ned's most prominent characteristic.

"There is no telling what Ned will do when in a teasing mood," she thought. It was natural to Zana to raise up little mental mountains to knock down when they could no longer make her uncomfortable.

"You are prettier than Zana," said Mrs. Conway, looking at Grace critically; "but you have not the least bit of style about you! I must train you a little, I see."

"You are very kind to take so much interest in me," replied Grace, wondering if that were the proper thing to say. She was almost afraid of the stately lady who did not seem to her one bit like a relative.

"What about New Year?" asked Zana, a little later, when they were seated around the table. "Are we to have the party?"

"We must, I suppose," replied her mother; "Grace and Ned must be introduced in good style. Mrs. Morgan will also give a party in their honor, I believe, and quite a number of card parties are talked of."

Grace listened eagerly, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. This was what she had so often longed for—to enjoy the pleasures which other young people enjoyed.

"What sort of a party are we to have," asked Rob.

"A dancing party, of course. It is more expensive, but there is less chance of the guests being bored to death. I sent the last of the invitations to-day."

"Was that what called you down town this morning?"

"No, I wished to make arrangements about decorations."

"Couldn't that have waited half an hour until you had welcomed Grace and Ned?" asked Rob.

"That is just like a boy!" exclaimed his mother. "As if you did not know that when one is to give a party there is danger of neglecting anything for a moment. Grace and Ned understand the situation, I'm sure, and would much prefer to meet me an hour or two later than have me run the risk of being ridiculed by all my friends."

Ned looked mystified. He had not heard the conversation between Grace and Zana, and did not know how unhappy a family could be who had given a party which was afterward pronounced, by the invited guests, "a horrid bore."

"How do you like Aunt Eveline?" asked Grace, as soon as she and Ned were alone together.

"Haven't decided yet."

"Neither have I. Isn't she pretty?"

"Rather; she gets herself up in great style."

"Can you realize, Ned, that she is our aunt?"

"I'm sure she is not," was Ned's astonishing reply.

"What do you mean?"

"Should I explain, you could not understand me."

"Oh, wise young man! Oh, great philosopher!" exclaimed Grace.

"Jes' so!" replied Ned, closing his eyes, and assuming an expression of calm enjoyment. "Let us have the rest of the titles which fit so well."

"Oh, low-browed idiot——"

"Silence, madam! Ask my pardon on your bended knees ere I strangle——"

Ned had sprung from his chair, and was endeavoring to force his sister to her knees.

"Oh, Ned," she whispered, "please don't. Indeed, indeed we must not romp here; some one will hear us."

"What if they should?" demanded Ned.

"They would not approve of it at all. Zana asked me to speak to you——"

"Zana acts like a crazy girl. I do not intend to romp with her."

"Don't romp with me while we are here. Aunt Eveline thinks it is rude and boisterous and perfectly awful in every way, and while we are in her house

we ought to do as she wants us to, don't you think so?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" Ned spoke discontentedly. "Now I can give you my opinion of Aunt Eveline. She cannot be a real aunt, or a real mother, or a real anything else, because she has no heart, soul or conscience!"

"Ned, you shall not talk so. She is father's brother's wife, and I'm sure we can love her if we try. She is very different from mother, of course; but you know mother says there is something in every one worth liking." .

"Let me know when you discover the lovable quality in Aunt Eveline. I have not your spiritual microscope, and cannot be expected——"

"Ned," interrupted Grace, "when I find it, will you promise to treat it fairly?"

"I'll worship it, Princess Grace."

CHAPTER XV.

FROM the day of their arrival in their uncle's handsome home, Ned and Grace found themselves in an atmosphere of unrest and excitement such as they had never before experienced. Grace was more at ease in it than Ned, who told her repeatedly that it was all nonsense to make such a fuss over a party.

"But it is to be very different from our parties, Ned. This will be just such a party as we have read about."

"I am willing to bet the last dollar I ever expect to see that it will not be half as much fun as our parties. Rob says it will be dreadful."

"And Zana says that Rob is always finding fault about her parties, just because he doesn't happen to like dancing. By the way, Ned, have you got that waltz step yet?"

"No, and never shall get it."

"Oh, please try hard! I want you to waltz with me. I can do it beautifully. Come, let's practice before the professor gets here."

Mrs. Conway and Zana had decided that Grace and Ned must learn to dance, else how could they enjoy the party which was to be given in their honor? Our friends had demurred, at first, saying

they were afraid their parents might not be pleased; but Zana told them that Aunt Marie had said no restrictions were to be placed upon them.

"I asked her particularly," continued Zana, "knowing that we should want you to learn to dance and play cards."

"Tell me her reply in her own words," said Grace.

"As nearly as I can remember, it was this: 'I want my children to enjoy themselves in their own way, while they are with you. They are old enough to decide such questions for themselves, and I shall place no restrictions upon them.'"

"That sounds like mother," replied Ned, nodding his head in approval. "For once, Zana, you seem to have been able to quote correctly."

Notwithstanding Zana's assurance of her mother's consent, Grace did not feel quite satisfied with herself when she finally told her aunt that she would see the dancing-master.

"If I could only see mamma alone for one little minute," she thought, "that I might be sure of her consent! I wish I had talked with her about it myself, or that I had seen her face when she made that reply to Zana. If I could have seen her eyes, I should know just what she meant."

"When you are in Rome, Grace, you must do as the Romans," said Aunt Sara, who had been watching Grace's face while these thoughts were flitting through her mind, and who did not scruple to give advice which, like that just quoted, is often more common than safe. "You need not worry about

what your mother will think," she continued; "when she was in Rome, she became a Roman."

"What do you mean, Aunt Sara?" asked Grace.

"Your mother danced beautifully when she was of your age. I remember her well. She was the belle of the ballroom. She is the last person in the world who would want her daughter to make herself conspicuous by being different from other young people."

Aunt Sara told many anecdotes of Mrs. Conway's girlhood, some drawn from actual occurrences, more from a vivid imagination, and Grace finally yielded to the wishes of her aunt and cousin, and submitted herself to the training which they considered necessary for an accomplished society girl of the period. Not only did she submit, but she became interested. Ned declared that she was infatuated, and that he had given her credit for a greater amount of common-sense.

"I may be infatuated with my dancing lessons," she retorted, "but how do you find time to notice it? Seems to me most of your time is given to the study of the rules of whist."

"Well; what else is there for me to do? If I try to relieve the monotony of sitting around with nothing to do, by romping a little, you exclaim, 'Oh, Ned, don't! We mustn't play here; it is considered rude. We really are not children any longer, etc., etc.,' until I'm sick of making the attempt. If I ask you to walk, it is 'Oh, I can't, Ned, there is so much to do.' I haven't had you to myself one half hour since we came here."

"I know, Ned, and I'm sorry. Things will be different after the party. Please don't let me keep you in the house; can't you walk without me?"

"If we were at home you would not like to have me answer yes to that question. You know I do not enjoy going alone, and Rob is kept in a continual stew about the party. One would think, to hear Aunt Eveline and Zana, that preparations for an important battle were being made."

As the time for the party drew nearer, the excitement in the house of Mr. William Conway became greater. There were things to be done which no one had thought of until it was almost too late to do them, and things to be undone which had been done without due thought and preparation, and every little while something happened which threatened total destruction to the best of the arrangements for the entertainment of the expected guests, reducing Zana and her mother to a state of despair annoying to themselves and every member of the family. Plans had been made for more extensive preparations than Mr. Conway wished to afford, and he scolded whenever more money was asked for, which was whenever he came into the house; then Mrs. Conway cried, and Zana became cross and sarcastic, and Mr. Conway handed out the money and left the house, slamming the outside door with such force that Aunt Sara went to bed with a fresh attack of nervous headache, or backache, or spinal irritation, or some other nervous disorder. These attacks were frequently preceded by an hysterick fit which sometimes demanded the undivided attention of the entire

household, and, for the first half-dozen times, frightened Grace exceedingly.

"I don't see how she can live and suffer so!" she whispered to Rob, one day, while bathing Aunt Sara's temples.

"She doesn't suffer enough to be very uncomfortable," replied Rob, coolly. "She is pretending."

Aunt Sara, who was supposed to be unconscious, began to cry, and Grace looked at Rob with eyes full of indignation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said.

It is needless to say that Aunt Sara found Grace very comforting, and managed to keep her busy a large share of the time. It was pleasant to her to have some one around who could be made to believe in all her whims, and a great relief to the rest of the family, to have the care of her transferred to Grace.

"You will learn your little lesson before long," Rob said to Grace one day when she had found her way to the porch for a breath of fresh air, after a long attendance upon Aunt Sara. "I hate to have your visit spoiled in this way, Grace, else I would never mention the subject to you again. Aunt Sara is really not half so sick as she makes you think she is. She always has these attacks when her assistance might be called for. Every party we give is a signal to Aunt Sara's hysterics to make themselves obnoxious. She has been worse than usual, this time, because you sympathize with her. Let her alone, and she will be quite well enough to appear at the party; see if she isn't. Now, don't look so indignant! I

am telling the truth. You may ask father if it is not so."

"Ask father if what is not so?" said Mr. Conway, who was just home from his office.

"I have been telling Grace that Aunt Sara's attacks are not at all alarming, and that they are trotted out for the occasion. Grace has nearly worn herself out waiting upon her."

"Is it so, uncle? I can't believe that any one who is perfectly well would pretend to be sick."

"Sara is not perfectly well, any more than the poor creature who has formed the morphine habit——"

"Aunt Sara does not take morphine, does she?" interrupted Grace.

"No, but she has formed a habit of going into hysterics, which is almost as bad."

"Why should she have formed such a habit?"

"She did not have anything better with which to occupy her mind. She was a selfish girl, never happy unless attracting attention. If she could not attract it in one way she would in another. She liked to have her own way, as we all do, and soon discovered that by having a fit she could get it. Of course she did not think that every time she indulged in such weakness, she made it more difficult to practice self-control. I doubt if it would be possible, now, for her to control herself."

"Poor thing! I feel sorry for her, anyhow," said Grace, with tears in her eyes.

"We should feel sorry for any poor creature who has become a slave to a bad habit," replied Uncle William. "We can, however, hardly accord them

the same measure of respect which we give to those whose lives point to nobler purposes. I have not spoken so plainly, my dear, to prevent you from caring for Sara, but that you may temper your care with good judgment, and also in the hope that you may learn a helpful lesson from her infirmity."

"Why, uncle! do you think——"

"That you need the lesson? No, dear; I see that you have a sensible mother. All such lessons are good, even if not given a personal application, in that they help the learner to exert a more beneficial influence. The stronger and better fortified against danger you are, the better you can help those less fortunate than yourself. You will be a joy to others, little girl; I can see it in your face."

Mr. Conway removed his hat, and held his hand to his head for a moment, and Grace noticed how much older he looked than her father, although he was two years younger.

"Does your head ache," she asked.

"Not much; just enough to make me nervous," he replied, going into the house.

"I wonder," thought Grace, "if uncle is not working too hard. I do not believe he scolds simply because he is penurious, as Zana says, but because he is tired, sick, and worried. I believe I am going to love my Uncle William very dearly. He talked ever so much like papa to-day."

Grace's train of thought was interrupted by a servant, who told her that the dressmaker was ready for her, and Grace hurried to the sewing-room, where a pale, tired little woman was trying to arrange

black lace draperies on a pink silk dress to suit Mrs. Conway's critical taste.

"Here, Grace," said Mrs. Conway, "please try this on, and then we will pin the draperies in place."

The pink silk was one of Zana's dresses, which, with a little alteration was made to fit Grace very nicely. The black lace belonged to Aunt Sara, who had loaned it to hide the faded streaks in the silk.

Grace's cheeks were scarlet as she stood to have the dress fitted, and any one who knew her well could have seen that she was greatly annoyed. She disliked borrowed finery, and had always declared that nothing should ever induce her to wear a garment which did not belong to her, as long as she had a calico gown of her own. But her Aunt Eveline had objected so decidedly to the plain black silk dress which she had intended to wear to the party, and to every other dress she had brought with her, that the poor child was greatly perplexed.

"They are all pretty," said Aunt Eveline, "and they fit you nicely, but none of them are suitable. I should have thought your mother would have given you a party dress, knowing that you would have needed one in the city."

"I buy my own dresses," Grace quickly replied.

"Is that so? Then you might better buy material for a party dress at once. I think I can get Mrs. Smith to come right to the house and make it for you."

"If you please, Aunt Eveline, I should prefer to

wear one of the dresses I have. I do not feel able to purchase a new one."

No one can tell, unless she has been in a similar position, and is young enough to remember how she felt about it, just how much it cost Grace to say that. There was never a young girl of her age who loved pretty things more than she did, and it was hard for her to think of going to her first party dressed so differently from other girls who would be there, as to be an object of general observation.

"I wonder why mamma did not mention the party dress?" she thought. "It has been so long since she attended parties that I presume she has forgotten what she wore, and perhaps they did not have special dresses for parties in those days, but simply wore their best ones as we do at home.

"I might ask papa to lend the money," she said slowly, after a little pause in which she tried to appear more indifferent than she felt.

Aunt Eveline sat with one finger raised to her lips, a habit she had when deep in a plan of ways and—means. "Why not?" she asked, then added quickly, "but you would not have time. If you were sure of getting it, you might ask your uncle to lend it to you for a few days. I would ask him to make you a present of the dress, if he were not so cross."

"I wouldn't have you ask him that on any account!" exclaimed Grace.

"But he will be perfectly willing to lend the money, I am sure," continued Aunt Eveline.

"On second thought, Aunt Eveline, I have decided not to borrow either of him or papa. I am sure

papa would consider me very foolish. He gives me all he can afford to spend on me, and I am already a little in debt to him. If my black dress is not suitable, perhaps it would be wiser for me to stay in my room."

"Stay in your room! As if you could! Why, every one has been told that the party has been given in your honor."

"What is that?" asked Zana, appearing in the doorway.

"Zana," demanded Grace, "why did not you tell me, before I left Oakwood, that none of my dresses were suitable for one of your parties?"

"What good would that have done?" replied Zana. "I had become well enough acquainted with you to know that you would not coax your father for more money, and I was afraid if I said one word that you would stay at home. Besides, I meant to make papa buy a dress for you."

"Zana! I wonder if you really think I would take it?"

"Wouldn't you, Gracie, to please me?" Zana looked very winning as she asked the question.

"Not even to please you, dear cousin; because I am sure that Uncle William feels as if he could not afford it, and I am more than sure that my father and mother would be vexed. They do not wish us to accept expensive presents from any one but themselves."

Zana looked greatly disappointed. She had been so sure that she could arrange everything to suit herself if she once succeeded in getting Grace to the

city, and in the midst of the excitement incident to a girl's first party.

"I don't see why I cannot stay in my room," began Grace.

"There is your pink silk," said Mrs. Conway to Zana, paying no attention to Grace's remark, which she had interrupted.

"Oh, Grace, would you wear it?" Zana's voice was full of pleading. "Please say yes. It is not very nice, but it is more suitable than anything you have, and can easily be made to fit you. Do, do say yes, Gracie! Be the dearest girl in the world."

Grace longed to say no; but it seemed to her that it would be neither polite nor generous, under the circumstances, so she spoke a reluctant yes, and then was obliged to submit to a great deal of petting from the delighted Zana, which she could not appreciate as she felt she should.

The pink dress was brought out for inspection. It was cut with a demi-train, which was somewhat soiled. There were faded streaks on the skirt, and worn places along the seams in the bodice. It had not been a very good piece of silk to begin with, and now looked decidedly cheap. Grace could not help thinking that it looked much worse than any dress she had; but she was too well bred to put her thought into words.

"Try it on, please, Grace. It does not look very well by daylight, but will look much better by gas-light. I believe it will need very little alteration."

"Oh!" exclaimed Grace, in a tone of dismay, as

the dress was slipped over her head, “must I wear it this way ?”

“What way ?” asked Mrs. Conway.

“Without any sleeves, and low in the neck.”

“Why, to be sure !”

“Aunt Eveline, I never can do it.”

“Never can ! Why not ? What nonsense you talk, Grace.”

“All party dresses are made that way,” hastily interposed Zana, who feared her mother’s tone of sharpness would arouse her cousin’s combativeness.

“That is the great reason why your dresses are not suitable. You will not feel at all ill at ease when you are in a room full of girls dressed just like you. I didn’t feel very comfortable when I put on my first low-necked dress, but in half an hour I forgot all about it. Please be good, Gracie, and don’t worry us any more. We are so anxious to have you look as my city friends do.”

“I will lend my black lace for the occasion,” volunteered Aunt Sara, with what her sister considered surprising generosity. “There is enough of it to cover the silk entirely, and then the faded streaks will not show at all ; you will be the best-dressed girl in the room, my dear.”

“Oh, Aunt Sara !” exclaimed Zana, who was as pleased as if she herself had been allowed to wear the handsome lace which she had always coveted, “You are just too lovely for any use !”

“Grace was kind to me when I suffered,” replied Aunt Sara, in a tone which plainly said that Zana had not been kind, “and I do not forget such things.”

Zana was wise enough not to continue the conversation, but gave her whole attention to the dress.

"I will pay the dressmaker," said Mrs. Conway, "and Grace need not——"

"Indeed, Aunt Eveline" interrupted Grace, "I would much rather pay her myself."

"I shall not allow it," insisted Aunt Eveline, with a pretty smile. "We have taken this matter into our own hands, Zana and I, and we shall not feel comfortable unless allowed to pay the bills. It will take all the money you can spare to purchase gloves, a fan, and a few necessary trifles which you will need to complete your costume."

And so it had been arranged, and Grace had not felt quite comfortable since. She had borrowed money of Ned for the fan and gloves and other necessary trifles, which had cost almost as much as she had intended to spend on her entire outfit for the coming summer ; but she had not yet told her brother about the party dress and the uneasiness it was causing her.

The dress was not to be tried on again before the party, and Aunt Eveline watched Mrs. Smith closely to see that nothing was left undone. She had a belief that all employees spent more time in evading work than in doing that for which they were hired, and boasted that she would be a very sharp woman indeed who could outwit her.

"Please, Aunt Eveline," begged Grace, "cover my shoulders as much as possible ! It seems to me that it would be pretty to have the lace fastened close around my neck."

"Her shoulders do look lovely through the lace," said Mrs. Smith, holding the lace under Grace's chin.

"That is rather pretty," admitted Aunt Eveline. "We will have it that way, but we must cut the silk lower in the neck, so as to have more of her shoulders showing through. Now, arrange the lace something like this."

"It can't be done, Mrs. Conway, without cutting it."

"The lace must not be cut," interposed Grace. "Aunt Sara said so."

"I never pay any attention to what she says," responded Mrs. Conway, cutting across the beautiful lace. "Sara is always fussing about something."

"But the lace belongs to her," faltered Grace.

"What if it does! It is only a piece of lace, and in all probability she will never wear it again. I dare say she will never discover that it has been cut, unless you tell her. Don't begin to fret over nothing, or you will get me so nervous that I shall not be able to tell whether this is draped right, or not. Remember that it would not have needed cutting had you not insisted on having your shoulders covered."

Poor Grace! She felt as if her cup of unhappiness was very nearly full. To have the lace cut against Aunt Sara's expressed wish, to be made to feel to blame for it, and then to have the party dress made still lower in the neck! It was hard indeed.

"How awkward you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Conway, sharply, as Mrs. Smith tried to pin the folds of lace. "Give the pins to me; I can do it better myself."

"I am very tired," replied the poor woman in a tone of apology, "and I am not used to making a dress on such short notice."

"Had we had more time, we could have gone to Madam Gray's," retorted Aunt Eveline, "so you ought to be very glad that we are in a hurry."

"Can you not rest a little while, Mrs. Smith? I am sure you will have time to finish the dress," said Grace. "You look so tired that I cannot bear to have you work on anything for me."

"It will be wiser to finish the dress first and rest afterwards," remarked Mrs. Conway, positively. "I know too well what it is to be obliged to wait for a dress until the guests begin to arrive."

When, at last, Grace was relieved, she rushed out of the room with a heart so heavy that she dare not trust herself to speak again, fearing she should cry. She felt that she must be alone a little while, and went into the library, knowing that it was usually deserted at that hour of the day.

"What shall I do!" she moaned, throwing herself on a couch, and burying her face in the pillow. "Oh, what shall I do!"

"What is it, little sister? Are you homesick?"

Ned came from behind the heavy window curtains, and lifted Grace so that her head rested on his shoulder, as he sat beside her.

"Oh, Ned!" sobbed Grace, "I thought you were

with Rob. Don't mind me! Pretend I'm laughing! I am awfully weak and foolish."

"Are you homesick?"

"No, not much; but I wish I were at home." Grace sat up, and dried her eyes. "I ought to be ashamed of myself for being so silly," she added, trying to force a smile.

"You don't make a practice of crying about nothing," replied Ned, gravely, and Grace's eyes filled with tears again.

"Don't baby me, Ned," she exclaimed, "or I shall be crying in earnest. I have been wishing all day that I could find a good excuse for going home."

"You don't tell me why, Grace."

"I can't dress as I please, to-night!"

"Why not?" Ned tried not to laugh. It seemed to him a very simple matter to feel so badly about.

"None of my dresses are suitable, so Aunt Eveline says, and Zana——"

"Zana is silly, and Aunt Eveline is——"

"Hush, Ned! We mustn't talk against them."

"Zana never looks half as well dressed as you do!"

"She dresses more stylishly, Ned."

"What does that amount to, if it doesn't make one look well?"

"It amounts to more than I ever supposed it did, before we came here. Well, they decided that I must have a party dress——"

"Is that the secret of the borrowed money?"

"Oh, dear, no! Ned, it is perfectly dreadful;

but every cent of that money went for things that will not be worth anything to me after the party—pink satin slippers, pink kid gloves, a pink fan, pink ribbons—it just makes me sick to think of it all! I shall be obliged to wear my old clothes for a year, in consequence."

"Don't give it another thought, Gracie. I had that money ahead; just consider that those things are a present from me."

"I shall not consider anything of the sort! You are not to save money for me to spend foolishly."

"You have not spent it foolishly. If other girls have such things, you ought to have them, too. I should not like to have you attract attention because of your economy."

"You haven't heard the worst, Ned."

"Let's have it! I'm braced."

"I am to wear one of Zana's old party dresses——"

"I don't believe it!"

"But I am, Ned."

"I shouldn't do anything of the sort. Wouldn't you look fine marching around in Zana's cast-off finery!"

"Oh, please, Ned! You make it so very hard! Don't you suppose I have thought of it over and over again!"

Grace buried her face on her brother's shoulder, and cried again as if her heart would break.

"So this is the trouble! Poor Queenie! It is tough, and no mistake. How did it happen, Grace?"

"They thought I would be so—so conspicuous—

in any of my dresses—and—and—Ned, I'm ashamed to lose my self-control like this!"

Grace wiped her eyes, and, getting up, began to walk back and forth across the room. "I am going to behave myself," she said, with a pretty little air of defiance. "You may not be able to believe it after this exhibition, but I am actually going to behave myself! The fact is, Ned, I have worried over this until I have nearly made myself sick."

"It isn't worth it."

"Wait until you have heard all I have to tell you. Well, they made me feel that they would be ashamed of me, and they would not agree to let me stay in my own room, and they wanted me to buy a new dress, which, of course I couldn't do. Then they thought of Zana's dress, and Aunt Sara lent some black lace for draperies. You see, Ned, I am to be dressed very much like a charity girl!"

"I do not see anything of the sort," responded Ned, sturdily. He recognized the situation, which he could not change, and had quickly resolved to make it as easy for his sister as he could. "If they really feel as you say they do," he continued, "and it makes them more comfortable to rig you out like a fashion plate, why, all you have to do is to remember that we are their guests."

"I have thought of that every minute; Ned; otherwise I never could have compelled myself to even think of wearing that dress."

"Pride and poverty," quoted Ned.

"It isn't pride altogether; it is self-respect. Ned, you don't know how that dress is made."

“Oh, spare me, Grace! I don’t care. I can’t understand tucks and ruffles.”

Ned had his hands raised as if in self-defence, and was hastening towards the door.

“But I must tell you a little about it, Ned!”

“Not one word! I’ll see it to-night, and that will be enough. I have no doubt that you will be stunning. Now, you’d better put your face a-soak in something! It is red as a beet, and your nose resembles a coffee-pot. My child, you are not charming when you cry; let me advise you as a friend——”

Grace darted towards him, and he disappeared through the door.

“Well,” she thought, “I suppose it wouldn’t have done any real good to tell him, for the dress cannot be changed now, but I wish I could have given him a little idea how I shall look before he sees me!”

CHAPTER XVI.

GRACE fully intended to go to Aunt Sara, as soon as that lady awoke from her nap, and tell her about the lace. She was a little anxious as to the effect such information would have on the invalid's nerves, but no other course seemed to her to be quite consistent with honor. Not only must she tell Aunt Sara, but she believed she must take all the blame on her own shoulders.

"Oh, dear!" she thought, wearily, "how much that dress has cost! Even poor Mrs. Smith was made to bear hard criticism on account of it, and was obliged to work when she ought to have been in bed."

"Where are you going, Grace?" asked Zana, as Grace passed her door.

"To see if Aunt Sara is awake."

"She is, but she will not see you or any one else, now. She is getting ready for the party."

"Getting ready for the party! Why, she has been sick all day."

"You mean you have worked over her all day while she stayed in bed. I presume you have soothed her nerves so that she will be in excellent spirits to-night. She says you do her a great deal of good," Zana added, mischievously.

"Zana, tell me truly! Is she going to be in the parlors to-night?"

"Of course she is! She wouldn't miss it for any amount, but she will remain in bed all day to-morrow, as a consequence, and be as cross as two sticks for a week."

"Well," said Grace, decidedly, as she started towards the door again, "if she is well enough to go to that party, she is well enough to see me."

"She may be well enough, my dear, but she won't see you. She is lying in bed with her face covered with raw beefsteak, and there she will stay until she has barely time enough left in which to dress. She makes it a rule never to see any one when her face is covered with raw beefsteak."

Grace stared at her cousin in amazement. "Raw beefsteak!" she finally managed to exclaim.

"Certainly, my dear!" Zana laughed merrily. "Did you never hear of that? It is to make her skin look soft and young. You and I will come to that some day."

"I never shall!" replied Grace.

"Well, I expect to. When I am old and ugly, I shall do everything I can to make myself look better. I believe that is a woman's duty."

"Faugh! A woman should have too much to do to think how her face looks."

"She may not think about it, but others will."

"If she is a good woman and does her duty, do you suppose any one will give a second thought to her personal appearance—that is, if she is neatly dressed and ladylike in her manners? Fancy my

mother lying in bed with beefsteak on her face."

"Your mother has a fine complexion and does not need to do so. She has some wrinkles, though, that she might get rid of if she would."

"I think mother's wrinkles are just what makes her face look pretty."

"Really, Grace, I think you do not take a sensible view of such things. A little society life will make you see very differently."

Grace opened her mouth to protest, but thought of the low-necked party dress, and remained silent.

"Two weeks ago," she thought, "I should have said that I would not wear a dress like that, and that nothing could induce me to appear in borrowed garments."

There were many last things to be done before the guests arrived, and both girls were quite tired when they went to their rooms to dress ; but both had forgotten all weariness by the time they entered the room where they were to help Mrs. Conway receive the guests.

"Is that the dress?" exclaimed Ned, on seeing Grace ; then, remembering that he had decided not to criticize it, no matter how much he might dislike it, he changed the subject abruptly by asking Rob why on earth city folks should not be expected to put in an appearance at a reasonable hour. Grace understood his effort to change the subject, and the hot tears sprang to her eyes. She had not expected Ned to be pleased with her appearance, but she had indulged in a faint hope that he might not disapprove of her dress quite so much as she herself did.

"Do you like Grace's dress?" asked Mrs. Conway of Ned, a few moments later, when Grace had found a pretext to take her into the conservatory.

"I can't say that I do," replied Ned, with the coolest of candor. He was out of patience with his aunt for making Grace appear like a guy, as he expressed it, and he took no pains to conceal his feelings.

"Ah!" responded Mrs. Conway, sarcastically. "Well, Ned, if I were you I would not tell her so. It is not necessary that you should let your prejudice, born of ignorance of the ways of the world, contribute to her discomfort. There are a great many persons in this world who do not like what they are not accustomed to, but often, in a few years, they are enabled to smile at their old prejudices."

Mrs. Conway said this with her sweetest smile, and in a voice so soft that an ear less sensitive than Ned's could not have detected the sarcasm; but he flushed with resentment.

"I presume that taunt is most fitting, Aunt Eveline," he replied; "but I never want to see the day when I shall be glad to have my sister dressed like that. I should rather be called an ignoramus, or a country bumpkin, or anything of the sort, all the days of my life."

Grace returned to the room in time to overhear that last speech, but at the same moment the guests began to arrive, and her hurriedly-formed purpose to go to her room and exchange the dress for one of her own could not be carried out. She had never in her life felt so utterly miserable; but there had never been a time when she felt that her brother had so good a

reason for disapproving of her. Next to her father and mother she cared most for Ned's good opinion, a state of mind with which many sisters cannot appreciate or sympathize. She went through her part mechanically, and earned for herself the reputation of being one of the most stupid girls in the room, a reputation which, had she known of it, would not have given her half the unhappiness she was enduring on Ned's account.

"Are you not going to dance with me?" she faltered, holding out her card as Ned came towards her.

"Indeed I am!" he exclaimed, taking the card. "I have had a time getting here, and don't you forget it!" Then, in a lower tone, "I was awfully afraid Rob would make me fill my card before I reached you. I shall put my name down here for all the rest of the round dances, and then we will dance or not, just as we please."

"Oh, Ned, I am so glad!"

"Don't worry about yourself, Gracie," whispered Ned, pretending to button his sister's glove. "You look more than half sick already! Don't think about the dress any more; it looks ten per cent better than any other dress in the room."

Grace felt as if Ned's praise was almost worse than his displeasure. She knew very well that he did not approve of the dress any more than he had at first, and that he was only trying to make her feel a little more comfortable about it. As soon as she could, without drawing attention to herself, she found a seat behind a tall, flowering shrub in a re-

mote corner of the room, hoping to be forgotten until her first dance with Ned was called. There was a large bow window quite close to where she sat, before which hung heavy curtains, and Grace had hardly seated herself when she became aware that some one behind the curtains was talking. Her hearing was exceptionally good, and she could not help but hear what they said.

“Why should we say anything to any one? It would only raise a row. Come, Zana, let us run away and be married, and do the talking afterward.”

Grace realized that she was playing the part of eavesdropper, and left her seat at once; but she trembled so much that she could hardly walk without tottering.

“What ails you, Grace? Are you sick?” Ned had noticed her white face, and was beside her almost instantly.

“Take me away!” she whispered, and, without another word, Ned helped her to her room, almost carrying her up the stairs.

“It was not meant for me to hear,” thought Grace, “and I have no right to repeat it, even to Ned; but oh! what shall I do?”

“Sit here,” said Ned, “and I will get some water. Are you feeling better?”

“Don’t get water; I am all right now.”

“Actually, Grace Conway, you came very near fainting away. I am quite ashamed of you!” Ned tried to speak severely, but every word told of the joy he felt to see his sister looking more like herself. He

was not used to sickness, and had been more frightened than he would have cared to own.

"It is as hot as an oven in that room," he continued, "and I felt uncomfortable; but I hope you'll notice that I did not faint."

"Neither did I faint," protested Grace.

"You would have, my dear, had I not rushed to the rescue. I thought you were never going to faint until I did! That is what a fellow gets for boasting about his sister."

"What do you mean?"

"I've told Rob over and over again, that you were not given to any such foolishness, and that——"

"Ned, please don't! I didn't faint, I only felt a little shaky."

"You little goose! Don't you know I am joking? What troubles you, Gracie? You haven't acted like yourself since we came here."

"Ned, let's go home."

"I'm willing. When shall we start?"

Grace suddenly remembered the conversation she had overheard, and thought that, perhaps, she would have no right to leave her cousin until very sure that she could not be of use to her.

"What geese we are, Ned!" she said with a smile. "I begin to think that you and I were not born for city life. I am feeling nicely again; suppose we go down, before our absence is discovered."

All during the remainder of that evening Grace's mind was busy with the new problem that had presented itself. What ought she to do? She was

quite sure she had recognized the voice behind the curtain as belonging to Harry Morgan, a fast young man, not yet twenty-two years of age. She knew that her uncle disliked him exceedingly, and had objected to his being invited to the party ; that her aunt, while not liking him, or approving of him, had decided that he must be invited because it would not do to offend the rest of the family by slighting him ; that he had called twice since Zana's return from Oakwood, and that her cousin had said to her one day : "Harry is not half so bad as he is painted. He likes fun, and so all the old folks, who have forgotten how they felt when they were young, hold up their hands in horror every time he happens to do something which they cannot understand."

The more Grace thought of it, the surer she became that Zana was engaged to be married to Harry Morgan, and had been for some time. She recalled a number of speeches which Zana had made at Oakwood, to which she had attached no importance ; but now every one of them helped to convince her of the truth of this new and startling thought. How could she best gain an influence over Zana, sufficient to prevent her from taking the step which Harry had suggested ? Suppose he should persuade her to go away at once, this very night ? Grace's heart stood still at the thought, and she looked around to see if her uncle were near, that she might go to him at once and tell him to watch Zana. Then came a new thought : "Perhaps Zana told Harry she would not go with him. I did not hear her reply. What right have I to believe that she would do wrong ? And

after all, it may not have been our Zana ; I did not hear her voice nor see her. There is more than one girl in the world named Zana ! I have no right to tell tales until I know what I am talking about."

And so Grace's uneasy thoughts kept troubling her, and every minute of the long evening became more tedious than the one that preceded it. She thought the time would never come when the last guest would be gone ; but finally the members of the family stood alone in the parlor, their weary faces contrasting strangely with the gay decorations, and Grace realized, with a sigh of relief, that her first party was ended, and that Zana was at home.

"I am glad it is over !" exclaimed Mr. Conway.

"So am I," responded his wife, " and I wish I could know that we need never give another party."

"Why need we ? "

"William, if I have explained that once, I have a hundred times ! You try my patience beyond measure. How can we expect our children to enjoy the advantages of good society, unless we entertain ? By this one party we have cancelled our most pressing obligations, and assured our children as many invitations as they will care to accept before the close of the season."

"A great many more than I shall wish them to accept, if they are to receive an invitation from all who were here to-night," replied Mr. Conway, significantly. "I must say, Eveline, that your definition of good society and mine do not agree."

"We cannot expect to entirely approve of everyone who goes in good society," responded Mrs.

Conway. "It is quite likely that there are some who do not approve of us. Indeed, I am very sure that we were subjected to severe criticism to-night."

"We may have been criticized for attempting something beyond our means," replied Mr. Conway, gravely. "We deserve such criticism at any rate; but we cannot be accused of dishonorable or disreputable conduct which would shut any one out from decent society, who was not covered by a cloak of wealth. I am utterly disgusted, Mrs. Conway, and I give you fair warning that this is the last party of which the expenses will be paid by me, until I have seen a list of all who are to be invited, and approved of it."

Mr. Conway had seldom been so angry, and his wife and children gazed at him in surprise. No one had been invited to this party, who had not before been invited to their home, and they could not understand why he had expressed so much more displeasure than usual. They did not know of the new train of thought which had been suggested to him by a comparison of his own and his brother's children, nor how that comparison had led him to a more careful study of his children's associates and habits of life.

Grace glanced at her cousin during the progress of the conversation, and was sure that she detected a look of uneasiness in Zana's eyes.

"Zana knows to whom uncle refers," she thought, her suspicion becoming more a certainty. "Shall I try to talk with her to-night, or would it be better to wait until to-morrow when she is rested?" Then

came the thought, "But she may be planning to go to-night!" and Grace reached a decision at once.

"Dear Heavenly Father," she whispered, as she followed her cousin up the broad staircase, "help me to say just the right thing. I am so prone to blunder; help me to-night!"

The two girls had hardly entered Zana's dressing-room when Grace's quick eyes caught sight of a letter which was lying on the table.

"A letter from Helen!" she exclaimed. "When did it come?"

"Just before dark. It was hidden by my fan before we went downstairs."

"Why did you not tell me it was here?"

"I was afraid it might contain something to worry you. If Helen should beg for a little more help, and you could not give it, I knew you would be in the dumps the entire evening."

Grace looked at Zana with flashing eyes. "Please remember," she said, "that I love Helen dearly, and that she is no beggar."

"You love her, the daughter of a washerwoman, better than you love your own cousin," retorted Zana. "How little would you care about what happened to me!"

"Oh, Zana, I can never tell you how much I should care! If it were something bad——"

"Grace," interrupted Zana, "please forgive me! I am cross. I am always cross after a party."

Zana spoke with an eagerness which suggested a strong desire to change the subject of conversation.

She had seen a look in her cousin's eyes which made

her uneasy, but which she would never have noticed had it not been for her guilty conscience.

"Read your letter," she added, playfully, "and I will be good. I should really like to know what Helen writes, but I presume you will hardly believe it, after that mean speech of mine. If I did not always persist in showing the ugly side of my nature first, I should not be Zana Conway."

Grace opened her letter without replying, but read it almost mechanically, for her mind was filled with thoughts of Zana.

"Well?" said Zana, questioningly, as Grace put the letter back into the envelope, and sat staring into the open grate. "What is Helen doing? She isn't in trouble, I hope."

"In trouble? Oh, no!" Grace started nervously, as her cousin's voice aroused her from the unpleasant reverie into which she had fallen. "Helen is attending an art school where tuition is free. Her materials to begin work cost her ten dollars; that left her little with which to pay board at The Woman's Boarding Home, but—"

"You told me all that while we were in Oakwood," interrupted Zana. "Did Helen copy one of her first letters to you?"

"I believe I had forgotten that you were at Oakwood!" replied Grace, looking embarrassed. "I was thinking that you wished an account of Helen from the time she left us."

"You were thinking of something besides that, my lady," thought Zana, who was watching Grace closely, "and I wish I knew what."

Zana's uneasy conscience made her long to know what Grace had on her mind, but she feared to ask. Instead, she asked how long Helen intended to remain in New York. Neither talked of the party as young girls usually do at such times,—Grace, because she could not just yet; Zana, because she would not, dreading something, she knew not what.

"When Helen left Oakwood," replied Grace, "she expected to stay but a few weeks. She would like to remain three years. A diploma is not granted for less than three years' study."

"Who is to help her all that time?"

"She hopes to be able to earn enough to pay her own expenses in a few months. It seems that the superintendent of the engraving room is quite disagreeable, because he does not believe in girls learning wood engraving. He says they might better do dressmaking, or kitchen work; just think of the meanness of that! He made life very hard for Helen during the first week she was there. Then she became acquainted with a lady editor of an illustrated paper, who was immediately interested in her, and went with her to the superintendent of the art department, who took her under his especial charge."

"Wouldn't it be fine for Helen if the superintendent of the art department were a young man, and became interested in her, on his own account, and would make the superintendent of the engraving room bow before her most humbly!"

"I think Helen would not consider it fine at all," replied Grace, coldly. "She is doing well now, and this lady says that when she has studied six

months, she will give Helen four dollars a week for part of her time."

"Four dollars a week after six months' hard work!" sneered Zana. "That is liberal, I must say."

"Helen thinks it an offer to be proud of. She says it is not the prospect of earning the money that pleases her so much as the knowledge that her new friend believes she can do worthy work."

"I think I do not understand Helen very well," said Zana, with sudden thoughtfulness.

"If you did, you would love her better than you do," replied Grace, seriously.

"It is just awful to be obliged to look forward to such a struggle with poverty as is before her," continued Zana. "I believe I should rather die."

"I think it is glorious to make one's own way in the world; and to be able to do so in the higher walks of life is enough to make anyone perfectly happy!"

"How enthusiastic you are, Grace! You have had no real experience with poverty; that is why you talk as you do."

Grace laughed. "One would think, to hear you talk," she said, "that such an experience had been yours."

"It has."

"Your father is richer than mine."

"Your father is richer in Oakwood, than mine is in Chicago. You do not need as much money as I do, for your friends do not spend as much. Why, Grace, you haven't the slightest comprehension of what this one party has made me endure."

“Why do you give such parties?”

“Because others do, and we are obliged to, or no notice is taken of us. Mamma is anxious to have us go in the best society, and we are not rich enough to afford it, and that is where the trouble lies. I am sick of poverty!”

Grace had nearly forgotten the task she had set herself, but when Zana spoke of the best society, it was quickly brought to her mind, and her heart began to beat violently.

“I think,” she said, “that uncle is right about there being a question as to the quality of the society.” And then our little friend lost control of herself, and behaved very differently from what she had thought she would. “Oh, Zana! Oh, Zana!” she exclaimed almost in tears, “was it you talking behind the curtains with Harry Morgan?”

“When?” Zana became very red, then turned pale. Grace looked at her without replying, and Zana knew it would be wiser not to try to evade the question. “Did you hear what we said?” she asked, almost in a whisper.

“I heard part of the conversation.”

“I did not think you an eavesdropper, Grace Conway!”

“I did not mean to be one, Zana. I wished to get away from the crowd, and found a seat behind the large oleander; but I left as soon as I knew that something was being said to which I ought not to listen. But oh, Zana! I heard enough to frighten me dreadfully.”

“Tell me what you heard.”

Grace repeated Harry's speech, word for word.

"What else?"

"Nothing more."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"I am not in the habit of telling falsehoods," replied Grace, coldly.

Grace's manner helped Zana to regain her self-control, and to realize that, by losing it, she was in danger of helping her cousin to information which she did not want her to have.

"No one would ever think to accuse you of falsifying," she said, trying to smile naturally. "I spoke petulantly, as I always do when you accuse me of something which you would not do yourself. If you had listened one minute longer, you would have known that you had no cause for alarm, for I told Harry I would not run away with him."

"Oh, Zana, I am so very, very glad."

Zana made no reply, but, taking down her hair, began to plait it. She did not tell Grace, that, after she had given Harry that answer, he had continued his pleading, and she had not said but that she might some day be induced to accede to his request. She told herself, now, that she really did not mean to do anything of the sort, and that she only pretended that she did to keep Harry talking, because in such talk she found a pleasure not offered by any other excitement in which she had indulged. There was enough truth in this explanation to enable her to picture herself as a very much abused girl,—a mental performance which never failed to afford her a great amount of satisfaction. Zana would have

been alarmed, could she have seen that the pleasant little path in which she was walking, led straight to the land of Hysterics, where her Aunt Sara had wandered for so many years ; for no healthy girl can see and understand a woman like Aunt Sara, without having a feeling of repugnance toward her.

Grace was so delighted with Zana that she quite forgot to inquire by what right Harry had made such a proposition.

“It is almost a pity,” she said, laughing, “that, if one overhears part of the conversation, she should be driven away by her conscience before getting the rest.”

“A great pity,” returned Zana, coldly, “especially when her love for the speakers suggests the worst possible ending to the conversation.”

“Why, Zana !” Grace’s voice was full of pain.

“Am I not right ?” demanded Zana, angrily. “You cannot deny it. Pray tell me why you were so dreadfully frightened ! Was it because you trusted me ? Had it been Helen instead of me, would you immediately have jumped to the conclusion that she meant to run away ? No, indeed. I am the sinner, to be watched over and guarded, and kept from doing wrong, if possible ; you are the saint who cannot do wrong except in relaxing your vigilance over the sinner.”

Zana was frightened when the tirade had escaped her. She had not meant to say just that. If the thought had ever been in her mind, she did not know it. The words seemed to drop from her lips without her knowledge or consent, and they could

not have sounded worse to Grace than they did to herself. The little habit of dissimulation, in which she was permitting herself to indulge, had gained control of her for the moment, and used her as it would. And notwithstanding this warning, she could not see her danger.

“Grace,” she said, and the poor child was trembling like a leaf, “I do not understand myself to-night. I do not know what made me say that ; it was awful, and I did not say it because I thought it. Do you suppose you can ever forget it ?”

“If you knew how much I love you, Zana, you would not ask that question. I do not blame you for feeling as you do.”

“But I want you to blame me !” exclaimed Zana, whose better angel was gaining an ascendancy.

“It is nearly daylight, Zana, and we have not closed our eyes ! Let us hurry and go to bed. We shall both have more sense after we have slept.”

Grace’s last thought, before she closed her eyes in sleep, was a prayer of thankfulness that Zana was safe.

Zana had two thoughts of about equal strength. One was, “I shall not listen to Harry Morgan again.” The other, “If I should, Grace will not now prove troublesome.”

CHAPTER XVII.

“THE next day after the ball!” exclaimed Rob, sarcastically, on the following morning, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table. “If I were an artist, and wanted to paint a picture of human dejection, that should be the subject.”

“It would represent the members of the family who gave the ball, would it not?” asked the father with a smile. “If a stranger were to see the faces around this table, it would be difficult for him to believe that, only last evening, we were supposed to have taken part in one of the joyous events of life.”

“It is always hard on those who give parties,” said Mrs. Conway; “but if no one ever gave a party how could any one ever go?”

“Why should one care to go to a place where nothing is to be gained, and——”

“Now, William, you know you are talking nonsense! I beg that you will spare us this morning, if you never do again! You know, as well as I do, why people attend a society event of any description, and how tired you would be of a world carried on in the humdrum style you profess to admire when you happen to feel cross. To give a party is not an easy task, by any means, but it is much better than to accept the consequences of not giving one. It is

unusually hard for people of our means to give parties, because we must do so much for ourselves which more fortunate people can hire done."

Mr. Conway left the room before the last sentence was finished, without having tasted his breakfast. He dreaded a repetition of the trials which must be borne by a woman who was so foolish as to marry any but a wealthy man. It was a favorite subject with Mrs. Conway after having been obliged to practice a little economy, and it seemed to him as if he knew by heart just what she would say. It is to be hoped that Mrs. Conway did not herself believe all that she said on this subject. To do her justice, it should be said that she never talked on it except when she was very tired or nervous, or suffering from some disappointment which she fancied money could have prevented.

Grace and Ned had kept silent during the conversation, thinking that it would not be polite for them to say a word which could be taken as an admission that they had not found the party enjoyable, since, as they believed, it had been given in their honor. Now Grace spoke, hoping to turn the conversation into a channel where all might take part in it, as was customary at her father's table, without indulging in unpleasant personalities.

"Is it not a question, Aunt Eveline, whether the wealthy can always be called the more fortunate?" she asked, looking up with a bright smile on her face.

"A question!" Aunt Eveline was astonished. "Child, I believe you are crazy. If your head is filled with such ideas on that subject as your mother

used to profess, for pity's sake don't trouble us with them this morning ! I have already heard quite as much as I can bear."

Grace colored with resentment and mortification, and Rob, who had quite understood the motive prompting the question, leaned toward her with mischief in his eyes.

"My dear cousin," he said, gravely, "no philosophizing at this table!"

"I did not mean to be rude, Grace, my dear," added Aunt Eveline apologetically; "but it always irritates me to hear any one extol the advantages of poverty when I have just been undergoing an experience which proves that it has nothing but disadvantages. There may be people who do not feel the disadvantages as keenly as I do, because they have less ambition—"

"Or because their ambition points in a different direction," thought Grace.

"But," continued Aunt Eveline, "I cannot be expected to sympathize with them as fully as if our thoughts travelled along the same line. For my part, I believe a girl should think a long time before giving her hand in marriage to a poor man. She should be very sure that she cares absolutely nothing for the advantages which wealth offers."

"What if, after due consideration," said Ned, "she decided that her feelings for the poor young man outweighed her love of the advantages of wealth?"

"She should remember that sentiment rarely outlives the trials of poverty, and be very careful not to make a fool of herself."

"And marry a rich young man for whom she has no affection?" asked Ned.

"Certainly not. A girl should never marry a man whom she cannot respect. I am afraid, Ned, that you, too, hold many of your mother's quixotic opinions—among them an idea that a rich man cannot be worthy of respect."

"I said nothing of that sort," began Ned, "and—"

"You looked it!" interrupted his aunt.

"And," continued Ned, taking no notice of the interruption, "I never heard my mother express any such sentiment. She believes that good or evil springs from a man's heart, not his pocket-book; but that if his heart is full of evil, he can do more harm with money than without it."

"Oh, well," said Aunt Eveline, carelessly, "it is a question hardly worth discussion. I presume we shall all be pretty much what we are born to be, anyhow."

Grace had listened eagerly to the conversation, hoping to hear something that would sink deep into Zana's heart, to spring up when needed to help her to overcome any evil temptation which might cross her pathway; but nothing more was said, and it was evident that Aunt Eveline did not care to have the conversation prolonged. At that moment, the maid, who had carried Aunt Sara's breakfast to her that morning, returned with the information that the invalid would like to see Grace at her earliest convenience. Grace immediately left her seat at the table.

"You are going to be lectured for lack of attention, and an inhuman disregard of the sufferings of others,"

said Rob. "You have been in the habit of carrying her meals, yourself, my dear," he explained, in reply to Grace's look of inquiry; "you must now show good reason for abandoning that pleasant pastime."

"Rob, you ought to be ashamed!" protested Grace, as she left the room.

"What is it, Aunt Sara," Grace asked, a few moments later, entering that lady's room, without rapping, according to a request made by Aunt Sara. Then she stopped abruptly, the bright smile left her face, and a troubled expression came into her eyes, which might easily have been taken for one of guilt by an observer so disposed. Aunt Sara sat propped up in bed, an expression of mingled triumph and displeasure in her steel-blue eyes. Spread out before her was the mutilated lace which she had just been ripping from the pink dress. She had awakened at an early hour, with every nerve at war with the rest of her body, and had sent a servant for Grace, with a message that she was very sick and needed her. The servant had been met by Rob, who told her to go back and tell Aunt Sara that Grace was resting and could not go. The girl had delivered Rob's message without taking the trouble to explain who sent it, or that she had not seen Grace, and ever since Aunt Sara had been endeavoring to relieve her overstrained nerves by indulging in a fit of anger, noiseless, because without an audience, but more vindictive than it would have been, had her vanity been soothed by sympathy. She put on a wrapper, and, finding her way to Zana's dressing-room, soon returned with the party dress which Grace had worn.

"I'll teach her," she said, "that a girl without common gratitude cannot expect favors. She shall never wear this dress to another party, unless she wears it without the lace."

Had Aunt Sara known how remote was the possibility of Grace ever again wanting to wear that dress, she would not have spent so much energy in ripping it apart, nor would the task have afforded her so great an amount of satisfaction. It was while at work that she discovered how the lace had been cut, contrary to her expressed wish, and realized that now she had a real cause for her displeasure.

"Well, miss," she said, coldly, as Grace ceased speaking, "I feel well paid for loaning you this lace."

"Oh, Aunt Sara, I'm so sorry——"

"Very sorry that I discovered what has been done, I don't doubt. I presume you hoped to get away before I should see it."

"I am sorry you lent me the lace at all."

"Oh, that's it! I knew I must be at fault, somehow, although I couldn't quite see how. Thank you for enlightening me."

"Aunt Sara, I don't know what to say——"

"If not too much trouble, you might explain how you happened to disregard my wishes concerning a piece of valuable lace, given me by my mother."

What could Grace say? She was strongly tempted to tell the whole story, but her sense of honor would not let her think it quite right to allow Aunt Eveline to bear the blame.

"Aunt Eveline bore the expense of fixing over the

dress," she thought, "and gave a great deal of her own time to it, besides, hoping to please me. Because I am not pleased is no reason why I should make her bear anything more."

"Aunt Sara," she said, "I can tell you nothing about the lace, except that it was cut because I expressed a desire to have my shoulders covered. I wish I had never allowed myself to borrow it, and I am more sorry than I can tell that it was cut."

"Undoubtedly!" The sarcastic emphasis given to that word cut Grace like a knife. "It is easy to say we are sorry after we have done a thing to suit ourselves, and enjoyed it, and then realize that we must face the consequences; but such sorrow seldom prevents us from disregarding another's wishes a second time, should they conflict with our own. When I asked you not to allow any one to cut my lace, I believed I could trust you. I did not think it possible that a woman like your mother would bring up a girl to have no regard for her promises."

"Aunt Sara, you shall not bring my mother into this conversation! She is everything that is good and is not to be blamed if her daughter is unworthy of her. I can see, now, as I did not see a moment ago, that I am altogether to blame about that lace. I have been weak and irresolute and wrong from the moment that party dress was mentioned, and I am utterly ashamed of myself."

To say that Aunt Sara was surprised, would be to put it mildly. She had not believed, for one moment, that Grace was responsible for the cutting of the lace, knowing how little she had been allowed

to say regarding any part of her evening costume, and she had not expected to find Grace more severe with herself than she had meant to be with her. The lady's plan was to scold Grace until she had reduced her to a satisfactory state of submission and humiliation, when she expected once more to have a nice little nurse, who would humor all her whims. But even Aunt Sara could see that Grace's manner was not such as is usually shown by a girl who means to fawn upon one whom she has abused until the worst of the storm has blown over, thinking to choose an easy way out of a difficulty. Uncertain as to what she would better say next, she managed to ask Grace for an explanation in a voice in which there was little left of sarcasm.

"I did wrong to allow myself to wear borrowed garments, Aunt Sara, and very, very wrong to wear a dress cut like that. It was a case in which I should have consulted my principles, rather than my desire not to give offense."

"Do you actually think it wrong for women to wear low-necked dresses?"

"I do not pretend to think anything about what other women and girls should wear," replied Grace. "I have only to decide the question with regard to myself. I'm sure it is wrong for me to wear such a dress; indeed, I am more convinced of it now than I was before I wore one. How much money will pay for the damage done your lace, Aunt Sara?"

"Child," there was a pleasanter tone in Aunt Sara's voice, "I do not want anything. I really do

not care half so much about it as I pretended I did. I wish, however, that you had told me about it, instead of leaving me to find it out for myself."

"I had no opportunity last night, Aunt Sara. It was not cut until late in the day. I started to come early in the evening, but Zana said you were getting ready for the party, and would not see me; so I decided to come to you as early as possible this morning."

"And then showed your anxiety by refusing to come when I was sick and sent for you." The spirit of sarcasm was again gaining control.

"When did you send for me?"

"This morning."

"I received no message from you, this morning," replied Grace, quietly.

"Did you not send word that you were resting and could not come?"

"Does that sound like me?"

"Not entirely unlike you, as you showed yourself yesterday."

"Did I not come every time you sent for me, and do what I could for you?"

"Oh, yes, you came! You could hardly have done otherwise, considering the circumstances; but you did not appear greatly concerned regarding what I was obliged to suffer."

Grace was silent, her mind filled with wonder that a woman of Aunt Sara's age could show herself so weak, and her heart filled with pity that she could not have foreseen the condition into which she was

drifting, in time to have prevented such a pitiful wreck of her life.

"You are very different from what you seemed when you first came here," continued Aunt Sara. "I presume that, when you thought the poor invalid had nothing more worth borrowing, you concluded to waste very little sympathy upon her."

"You poor thing!" exclaimed Grace, impulsively, "what a dreadful condition your mind—" she stopped abruptly, remembering that a good nurse does not talk to a patient of his symptoms, and began stroking Aunt Sara's head. "If my manner is any different," she said, "I suppose it is because I understand your case better than when I first came."

Grace was beginning to see how jealous an hysterical person is of her reputation as a great sufferer, and proceeded cautiously. "You know, Aunt Sara, that I have had very little experience with sickness, and at first you frightened me awfully. When you had those queer spells, I thought every breath must be your last."

"Now, I suppose you think I do not suffer at all," replied Aunt Sara, petulantly.

"Now I know the attacks are not so serious as I at first thought them," replied Grace, quietly.

Aunt Sara made no reply. She knew, now, that, so far as Grace was concerned, there was an end to the pleasant sensation which was afforded her by the ministrations of one who believed in the reality of all her simulated sufferings; but Grace had not wholly deserted her, and she concluded to drop a

subject of conversation which she knew could not be carried on with any credit to herself. When Grace had stroked her forehead for some moments, she pretended to fall asleep, hoping that she would be left alone for a little while. She found it more irksome than she would have deemed possible, to be cared for by one whom, she was sure, did not believe such ministrations necessary.

Grace kept her place by the bedside for some time after her patient had closed her eyes, fearing that a movement on her part might disturb her.

“Poor Aunt Sara,” she thought, her eyes filling with tears, “I believe uncle understands her better than I do ; but oh, I am so sorry for her ! Why couldn’t some one have pointed out the danger, before the habit became too strong for her to overcome ! How I wish I could help her now.”

A number of plans suggested themselves whereby Aunt Sara might be helped to overcome the habit of many years, but all were quickly dismissed as being of little value, and all the while Grace was brooding over this new problem, her hands swept Aunt Sara’s brow with the steady, gentle motion that the weakened nerves had found so soothing. The effect was less magical than usual on this occasion, however, for Aunt Sara, weary with being kept so much longer in her feigned slumber than she had expected to be, pettishly asked herself if she were never to be left alone, and if it might not be a good plan to wake up, in a few moments, and declare that it made her nervous to have her head stroked. She would speedily have carried that last

suggestion into effect, could she have known what was going on in the mind of her little nurse ; for, even had she undeceived herself to the extent that all who knew her were undeceived regarding her fancied sufferings, she would not, then, have cared to overcome the habit she had cherished so long.

A doubt of God's ability and willingness to settle every difficulty presented to Him by suffering humanity, had never entered Grace's mind. She went to Him with all her little troubles just as freely as she went to her mother. If the difficulty was not settled in the way she asked, she decided that God had a better way which would some day be made known to her. Her childlike trust in her Heavenly Father was a subject of wonder to some of her young friends, who, knowing less than she did of the beauties of His word, yet felt themselves called upon to offer disparaging criticisms at every opportunity. But, notwithstanding their assumed superiority of discernment on such subjects, there was not one of these critics who exerted the influence among his companions that Grace did, or who commanded the love and respect that was so freely accorded her. After vainly trying to solve some plan whereby Aunt Sara might be helped, no other course seemed so good as to talk to her Heavenly Father about it.

“Are you sleeping, Aunt Sara ?” she asked softly.

Not a quiver of the eyelids denoted that Aunt Sara was not as sound asleep as she pretended to be, and Grace dropped on her knees beside the bed, and buried her face in her hands ; then, in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper, she offered up the follow-

ing petition : " Dear Heavenly Father, if it is true that Aunt Sara's sickness is only a bad habit, please make her see it in that light, and help her to overcome the habit and be strong, that she may give her life to some useful work before it is too late. Oh, dear, dear Heavenly Father, please hear my prayer, for it is awful to think of any one wasting a whole lifetime in making herself and others believe that she is sick. I am sure she did not realize what she was doing when she first began ; but now the habit is stronger than she is, and I'm sure she can never overcome it unless you help her."

Grace arose, touched Aunt Sara's forehead lightly with her lips, then passed out of the room on tiptoe, not dreaming that she left a patient behind whose mind was filled with emotions so conflicting that it would not regain its self-complacency for many a long day, if ever.

As Grace closed the door behind her, she chanced to glance from the window at the head of the stairs, just in time to see Harry Morgan slip a note into Zana's hand, as that young lady passed him in an alley back of the lot on which the row of tenement houses was built.

" How happened Zana to be out there ? " she thought, " and with only a light breakfast-shawl around her. And how happened Harry Morgan to be there ? That is not the way to his father's office, neither is it the road a young man would naturally choose when starting for a morning walk, or to make a party call."

Strange as it may seem, no touch of last night's

suspicions entered Grace's mind. She had fully believed Zana's explanation, and also what Zana implied when she said she had refused to do as Harry wished. Her only thought was that she would have a fine opportunity to tease Zana about a most romantic meeting which she had chanced to witness.

"I'll describe the meeting to her before Ned and Rob," she thought, a mischievous smile playing about her lips, "and I'll describe the interested parties in such a way that it will take the boys some time to guess to whom I refer. How it will bother Zana!"

Suddenly Grace remembered the note which Harry had slipped into Zana's hand and her heart became heavy.

"Is it possible," she asked herself, "that Zana, dear cousin Zana, is deceptive?"

Grace was too generous to entertain such a suggestion, and decided that Zana happened to be in the alley when Harry passed, but did not arrange to be there, and that she should not be considered entirely to blame if he persisted in his importunities.

"Zana is weak," Grace thought, reluctant to admit it even to herself; "but there are many weak people who are not wicked, and I have no right to assume that she means to do wrong simply because she is foolish enough to keep up her acquaintance with a young man who urges her to do so. Perhaps she will tell me about the letter, if I do not act as if I distrusted her, and then I may have an opportunity to convince her that she ought not to have anything more to do with Harry."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ZANA had caught sight of Grace as she turned away from the window, and knew that her meeting with Harry had been observed. She was, therefore, not surprised at the expression of gravity on her cousin's face, but, having allowed nearly an hour to elapse before seeking her society, was quite prepared for it. Grace was in the sitting-room, trying to become interested in a conversation between Rob and Ned, on street-car service, but was too worried about Zana to think of much else.

"I met Harry Morgan, this morning, Grace," said Zana, carelessly, as she entered the room and threw herself on the couch. "Lelia writes that she is planning a fine party in your honor."

"That note must have been from Lelia!" thought Grace. "Why couldn't I have thought of that? I must be growing decidedly suspicious."

Grace would not have felt so greatly relieved as she did, could she have known that Lelia had written regarding the party two days ago, and that the note now resting in Zana's pocket contained a new plan which Harry had promised to make known to Zana, provided she would meet him in the alley at a certain hour.

"You may count me out on that party," said Rob, before Grace could think of a suitable reply.

"Why so?" asked Zana, quickly.

"For two reasons that you already know. I do not care to go, and father wants us to have nothing to do with the Morgans."

"I can't understand why you do not care to go," replied Zana, who preferred to ignore Rob's second reason.

"I dislike Harry Morgan. I have disliked him ever since I knew him."

"You are not expected to be in love with everyone you meet in society," replied Zana, disagreeably.

"Nor do I feel under obligations to throw myself under the feet of a fellow whom I dislike. You invited the Morgans here, and I was as polite to them as I knew how to be; but I'll be—well, older than I am now before I'll deliberately put myself where I must go through it when unnecessary."

"Do you know anything against the Morgans?"

"Nothing in particular. I presume they have done nothing to give them a place among the criminal classes," replied Rob, provokingly. It was more than Zana's temper could endure.

"Please understand, Mr. Robert Conway," she said, "that Harry and Lelia are friends of mine, and I'll thank you not to speak of them as you have just spoken, until you have something more than your prejudices on which to base your opinion."

"Zana, every day Harry and his sister do things which you would not countenance in poor people,"

replied Rob, gravely. "I don't see how you can excuse so much."

"I am not responsible for what they do, neither am I the only one who seems to give them countenance. There are no young people in our set who receive more invitations than they do."

"Is that a good reason for our liking or disliking a person?"

"It is a good reason why we should hesitate before making our likes or dislikes public by refusing to accept or extend an invitation. There are rules of society which should be obeyed, just as there are rules of business which cannot be ignored. A man does not expect to inquire into the habits of every man with whom he does business, to discover whether or not he can make a bosom friend of him; neither does he denounce him as a scoundrel without good and sufficient cause."

"Your idea, then," said Ned, "is that the heart is not a factor in our social relationship any more than in our business relationship."

"Just that," replied Zana.

"In other words, you make it a business to get into the best social circles you can."

"Yes, I suppose that is as good a definition of the situation as we can find."

"What are we to understand by best society?"

"Why, they who are endorsed by the greatest number of people whom one would be glad to know."

"Tom, the saloon-keeper, would not care at all about being included in the social circle which would

welcome a Henry Ward Beecher, because Tom and Beecher do not endorse the same class of people. Your definition is not very explicit." Ned looked as if he considered his argument unanswerable.

"You know well enough what I mean," replied Zana, starting towards the door, "and I'll not waste time in talking to you."

"Head her off, Rob!" shouted Ned. "Let's make her stay until she has properly defined her position. This is more fun than I've had in a week."

"My dear girl," said Rob, leading his sister to a chair, "you might as well take it easy! You have excited our curiosity, also our combativeness; you cannot go until you have reduced us to a normal condition."

"Rob, you're wandering!" exclaimed Ned. "You devote yourself to keeping her in the room, while I ask the questions."

"You need not trouble yourself," retorted Zana, "for I shall not answer them."

"Miss Zana, is it not true that each individual must decide for himself what constitutes the best society?"

There was no reply.

"Rob, pressure will have to be brought to bear until a reply is given," added Ned, with mock solemnity, after waiting for a few moments for Zana to speak.

Rob put both arms around his sister, and squeezed her until she begged for him to stop.

"Answer Ned's questions!" he commanded. "Yes, or no?"

"Yes," gasped Zana, and Rob set her free.

"You have admitted, my dear young lady," continued Ned, "that each one decides for himself what society is best. That means, what he most enjoys, does it not?"

No reply.

"Rob, more pressure!"

Rob extended his arms threateningly.

"No, oh, no!" exclaimed Zana, putting up her hand in self-defense. "I'll say it! What do you want me to say?"

"In deciding what is the best society, you consider the amount of pleasure you hope to receive, do you not?"

"No."

"The amount of discomfort?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I am not obliged to say."

"Yes, you are. Rob, more pressure!"

"No, no, I'll answer. Grace, why don't you help me?"

"Grace has been lost in thought for the last hour; let her alone. It is an experience she seldom enjoys. Answer my question!"

"What is it?"

"What do you take into consideration when deciding what society is to be labeled best?"

"I presume I think of the personal advancement to be gained."

"Mentally?"

"Not entirely."

“Morally?”

“Partly.”

“What an awful fib!” exclaimed Rob. “Think of the moral influence of the Morgans, or the mental either, for that matter! Do we invite them because of their ability to help us mentally or morally? Oh, Zade, you make me very sick!”

While Rob was engaged in endeavoring to strike an attitude which would give him the appearance of a physical wreck, Zana escaped to her own room, where she was immediately joined by Grace, who found her in tears.

“Why, Zana!” she said, “do you care so much as that for the boys’ teasing?”

“Rob is always saying mean things about the Morgans,” sobbed Zana.

“He did not say anything so very much worse than they deserve, did he?”

“Grace, it is not like you to talk against the absent. You accept everything papa and Rob say about my friends, and my opinions are of no account.”

“Doesn’t your father know the Morgans as well as you do?”

“No, he does not. Papa is prejudiced. He forgets that he was young once, and does not excuse boyish follies in others. He expects a boy to think just as he does about everything.”

“Rob seems to agree with him regarding the Morgans, and Ned disliked Harry the first time he saw him. So did I.”

“Why, pray?”

“Because he did not impress me as being honorable. If he were as honorable as we would wish our brothers to be, he would never have said to you what he did last night. Think of Rob or Ned trying to persuade a girl to disobey her parents ! You knew Harry was wrong, else why did you not accept his proposition ?”

“There have been many good men and women who ran away to be married.”

“Are we taught to consider them models of propriety ?”

“There is such a thing as thinking too much about propriety.”

“Not for girls of our age. Zana, I don’t like this sort of talk ; it is disgusting ! Why should girls of sixteen think of beaux or marriage or any such nonsense ? I feel as if I had lost my childhood since I came here, and I don’t like it.”

“Mother was married before she was seventeen,” replied Zana.

“And every day she says she wishes she had never married. My mother was twenty-six when she married, and I never heard her make a speech of that sort.”

“Your mother and mine are different in every way.”

“Mamma often tells me what a nice long period of girlhood she enjoyed, and how much girls miss by becoming young ladies too soon——”

“It would be nice to have a long girlhood if one had plenty of money, and could have a good time ; but it is horrid to be a poor girl, and see other girls,

no better than we are, who have as much money as they can spend. I would rather be rich and married, than poor and free."

"Are the Morgans very wealthy?" asked Grace, suddenly.

"Very," replied Zana, unguardedly. "Lelia has more money to spend in one week than I have in a year."

"Zana, you and Harry Morgan are engaged to be married, and you have denied it."

The conviction had come into Grace's mind with such force that it almost seemed to speak itself, without thought on her part.

"Are we?" asked Zana. Her manner was decidedly flippant, but her eyes blazed angrily.

"Are you not?" Grace spoke with an earnestness that Zana found uncomfortable. "Perhaps it is none of my business," she added, "but it really seems as if it would be better for you to tell me."

"In order that I might receive your blessing?"

"That I might try to help you."

"Thanks; when I need your help I shall not fail to call for it."

"Zana, please don't talk so! Can't you confide in me? I have never yet proved unfaithful to you, and we are own cousins, yet you do not trust me as much as Helen does."

"Nor do you trust me as you do Helen."

Zana's manner was freezing, and Grace felt like letting her alone; but, on second thought, she

decided that she ought to make one more attempt to gain her cousin's confidence.

"If I did not think so much of you," she said, "I should never again speak to you on this subject; but it breaks my heart to think that you may be in danger of doing what you will always be sorry for. Zana, please tell me truly; are you engaged to be married to Harry Morgan?"

"You have made the assertion, my dear cousin, and I am sure you may be trusted to find the proofs. When you have succeeded, you have my permission to go to my parents with your information. I know the permission is entirely unnecessary, but you have it, nevertheless."

Zana bowed obsequiously and left the room, blowing a kiss from the tips of her fingers to her cousin before closing the door behind her. It was a manner of showing anger that surprised Grace, and for a moment she sat perfectly still; then, suddenly arousing herself, she hurried to the door and called to Zana, who was half-way downstairs:

"Zana!" The name was spoken in a tone of voice that demanded recognition.

"Well?" asked Zana, looking back over her shoulder. She hoped Grace meant to try to coax her into a better frame of mind, as she had done before, when there had been a disagreement between them.

"I wish to tell you," said Grace, in a resolute tone, "that I am going home."

"Going home! When? Why should you do that? What do you mean?"

Zana turned and ran back to her room, dragging Grace with her.

"I mean what I say—I am going home, but I must speak with Ned about it before I can tell you on what train I go."

"Pshaw, Grace! You do not mean it. You ought not to take a little quarrel so seriously. I presume I said too much; that is a fault I have, but you were aggravating, too."

"I have said nothing that I am not likely to say again," replied Grace, seriously. "I do not seem to understand you, Zana, as well as I thought I did when you were at my house——"

"Oh, I had nothing there to bring out my bad qualities; you did not know me at all! I have told you, more than once, that your opinion of me was better than I deserved."

There was a touch of earnestness in Zana's voice, although she tried to speak as if she did not expect to be believed, and Grace's generous, sympathetic nature was quick to notice it. Her heart prompted her to make up the quarrel, as she had done on previous occasions, with loving assurances of her affection for Zana; but her better judgment told her to cling to her first plan.

"Zana," she said, "I must be candid with you; I should not feel right if I were otherwise. I think you have not been so with me, and I have become suspicious regarding a matter which concerns me only through my love for you. If I stay, I shall feel all the time as if I ought to do or say something

about it, and so I think it will be best for me to go home."

"But think of all the parties that are to be given in your honor!"

"They form another reason why it would be better for me not to be here. I should not wear that dress again, or any other dress that does not belong to me, and you would not be pleased to take me in what I have."

"But just think what folks will say!"

"They may say what they please so far as I am concerned. I wish I had nothing more than that to worry about."

While the girls were talking, Zana's mind had been busy. She did not like to have Grace go home so soon, yet she could not but see that such a course would be an easy solution of more than one difficult question of which her cousin's wardrobe was not the least. She knew that she could never feel perfectly willing to introduce Grace in a costume very different from those worn by her friends, and she was well enough acquainted with Grace to be sure that she had really decided to wear her own dresses in the future, or remain at home. At sixteen, such questions are of far greater importance than they seem a few years later, and Zana must not be blamed too severely for her weakness in the matter. In addition to those considerations was the thought that, should she agree to the plan Harry had outlined in his note, she would leave her home forever in a little more than a week; in that case it would be better if Grace were not there, not only because Zana

would be sorry to treat her so impolitely, but because Grace might interfere with her plans in a manner most annoying.

Zana was not yet sure that she meant to run away with Harry. She knew that she did not wholly approve of him ; neither did she like to do what would grieve her family, as she was sure such a step would be likely to do. She had been engaged to him for several months. The engagement had been entered into because she was attracted by the novelty of the situation, not because she really cared for Harry or expected to marry him. Now, he offered her a choice between marrying him as he proposed, or breaking the engagement. She did not disguise from herself the fact that she would accept the latter without hesitation, if it were not for her dislike of poverty and for the fascination of the life she pictured as wife of a man who could have all the money he wanted. She knew there were quite a number of her girl companions who would be delighted with the prospect of becoming the daughter-in-law of the wealthiest man in their set, and she liked to think how they would envy her ! Poor, silly Zana ! She was beset by temptations that have proven too strong for many a girl whose life is not devoted to some object worth striving for, and whose training has not impressed upon her mind the fact that money cannot buy the best that life can give. She offered some, indeed many, weak objections to Grace's proposed plan, but she could not successfully disguise the fact that the thought of it really brought her more of relief than regret.

After making a poor attempt to converse on other topics, as if nothing had happened, Grace excused herself and went in search of Ned. She found him in the library, where he usually spent his time when alone.

"Hello, Sis!" he exclaimed, as Grace entered the room, "I've been wishing you'd put in an appearance. Suppose we go sight-seeing this afternoon."

"Ned, I want to go home!"

"You do!"

"Yes; just as soon as we can start!"

"What do you mean? Have you heard bad—is mother—"

"It has nothing to do with home; it is something else. Please don't ask me! When can we start?"

"See here, young lady! Do you think I'm going to be dragged around the country with my eyes shut? I insist on knowing the meaning of your sudden change of plans."

"I think I ought not to tell you, Ned. Believe me, I have a good reason."

"And believe me, you might better make it known!"

Ned spoke lightly, but Grace knew he meant what he said, and that he would not take a step until he knew why she insisted upon it. It was a recognized fact among those who knew Ned well, that he could never be induced to do a thing until he understood why it was to be done.

"I should like to tell you, Ned, but it concerns another."

"You can trust me, Grace."



"I know I can. Well, listen."

Grace told her brother of the conversation she had overheard at the party, of the meeting she had witnessed between Zana and Harry, and what had just taken place between Zana and herself.

"I should not think of going home," she concluded, "if I could do any good here; but I can't. Zana says there is nothing between her and Harry, and is offended because I do not quite believe her, and I can't help feeling that she has not told the exact truth."

"Ought you not to speak to Uncle William about it?"

"What can I say? I really have no definite information. Zana may simply be indulging in what she calls fun, and I think neither Uncle William nor Aunt Eveline would be disposed to think it of much consequence. When can we go home?"

"Not this evening, because we should not have time to get our things together," said Ned, thoughtfully.

"Then you think it would be best for us to go?"

"To be sure I do. Suppose we start to-morrow night."

"That will suit me."

"Can't we see something of the city between now and then? Give the rest of your time to me, won't you?"

"Yes, I will. I don't care whether the others like it or not. I'll go and put on my street suit and we'll start at once. I shall be glad to get away from every one but you."

As Grace was about to leave the room, the servant brought a letter from her mother.

"I cannot write at length, dear children," she read aloud to Ned, "because Mrs. Dayne is very ill, and I am giving her as much of my time as I can. If she does not improve, I shall send for Helen before long. I miss you more and more as the days go by, but don't let that shorten your visit. I presume I am selfish to mention it.

"YOUR LOVING MOTHER."

"Now we have a good reason for going home!" said Grace; "I must help take care of Mrs. Dayne. I am glad to have a reason, for I have wondered how we could end our visit so abruptly without making unpleasant explanations."

At dinner Ned announced that Grace and himself intended to start for home on the following evening. Aunt Eveline and Rob had been told by Zana of their sudden resolution, while their cousins were sightseeing, and in answer to their inquiries as to their reason, had said that she did not know, but thought it was caused by their old-fashioned prejudice against evening dresses.

"Going to-morrow!" exclaimed Mr. Conway; "for what reason?"

"They do not like our style of entertainment," interrupted Aunt Eveline in a tone of well-bred disgust. "Your brother and his wife must be ridiculously puritanic in their notions, William. I never

saw young people so utterly ignorant of society conventionalities!"

Mr. Conway did not reply to his wife, but turned toward his niece.

"Grace, tell me why you are going?" he said, regarding her with a searching glance that reminded her of her father, when he thought there was an indication of rebellion against his authority on the part of one of his children. "Is it on account of your wardrobe, or simply because you do not enjoy city pleasures?"

Grace hesitated. "There are a number of reasons, uncle," she said, finally; "perhaps you would consider none of them of sufficient importance to account for our sudden determination. I think I do not enjoy balls very much, although I might, if I could dress as I please without being criticized, and dance with no one but Rob and Ned. But that is not my only reason. The mother of my dearest friend is very sick, and my mother is helping to care for her. I think I ought to be at home to help, not only because it is Helen's mother, but because mamma will be obliged to work too hard if I am not there."

"Grace, your mother ought to feel proud of so unselfish a daughter. I should be, I know."

"It is too bad that your own daughter is so unsatisfactory," replied Zana, coldly. "Perhaps she will not trouble you much longer, however."

Zana left the room abruptly, and Grace looked at her uncle in alarm.

"Oh, Uncle William!" she exclaimed, "I wish you had not said that."

"It will do her good."

"She may make it an excuse to leave home. You heard what she said."

Uncle William laughed. "She has threatened to relieve us of her presence ever since she learned to talk," he replied. "You must learn that Zana is not to be taken seriously, when she is out of temper."

"Still," persisted Grace, "I believe Zana thinks you do not love her very much—not as papa loves me—and that you would not be sorry if she were to go away, that is, if she were not in trouble. She told me so once, when she was not out of temper, and I felt so sorry for her! I don't know what I should do if I were not sure that papa and mamma missed me every minute I am away from home."

Mr. Conway made no reply, and Grace was afraid the words which she had found so hard to speak might make a greater misunderstanding between Zana and her father, instead of influencing them to treat each other with more affection.

"If Zana loved Uncle William as I love papa," she had thought, "she could not do a thing which would hurt him, as he would be hurt should she run away with Harry."

The remainder of the meal was eaten in silence, and Grace was glad when it was finished, and she could go to her own room to pack her trunk.

"Grace," said Ned, who had followed her, "are you sure you are doing right in not telling uncle?"

"Have I a right to tell what I do not know to be true? Zana says I am mistaken, and I have no proofs to the contrary."

"I can't bear to think of Zana with that puppy! I should like to take him by his heels and snap his head off! What can she see in him to tolerate?"

"The Morgan money attracts her, I think. Zana is not half so nice here, as she was at our house. I believe it is the result of this artificial way of living. If I were to stay here a month I should be as nervous as—as Aunt Sara is."

"You would get used to it after awhile, and be yourself. I do not see the necessity of changing one's character with one's surroundings."

"I know you don't, Ned, and that makes me feel all the worse about that party dress."

"Let us hear no more about that party dress," said Ned, placing his hand over his sister's mouth.

While Ned and Grace were talking together before the half-packed trunk, Rob and Zana were quarrelling in the sitting-room.

"I told you they were too sensible to enjoy our ridiculous puppet shows," said Rob. "Why couldn't you have listened to me, and entertained them decently, as they did us!"

"Grace wanted to see something of city life."

"And you showed her its weakest side. There are so many things in the city which they would have found entertaining and instructive, and of which they have seen comparatively nothing. All of our time was given to that party, and what did it amount to? But what else have you been doing? I know by the way you and Grace looked at the table to-day that something has gone wrong between you."

"And if there has, am I obliged to confess to you?"

"Not obliged, but if you should, I might be able to act as peacemaker. Zana, we had a glorious time at Oakwood! Think how we are showing our appreciation. I would try to persuade Ned to give up this notion, but I am sure he is acting to please Grace, and that she is bent on going because of something between you."

"You are at liberty to ask her for an explanation. I have nothing more to say."

"Well, I have! Since you cannot show proper hospitality to the guests I care for, I no longer hold myself under bonds to treat your friends, the Morgans, with respect. I have refrained from telling Harry Morgan what I think of him, simply because you seemed to wish to be on intimate terms with the family. Now, I shall not take pains to hide my feelings, or to leave him in doubt as to my reason for staying away from their party."

"Are the Morgans to give a party?" asked Mr. Conway, who had listened without comment to the quarrel between his children. Quarrels were of too frequent occurrence in that house to attract much attention.

"Yes, sir," replied Rob, "and we are invited."

"Well?"

"I am not going."

"And you, Zana?"

"I have not decided."

"How can you go without Rob?" asked Mrs. Conway, hastily. She wished, if possible, to pre-

vent her husband from issuing the command which she knew he had in mind.

"If my brother refuses to go with me, I presume there are others who will be glad to accompany me."

"No one will accompany you there, Zana!" Mr. Conway spoke with unusual sternness. "I desire you never to go to their house, never again to invite them here, and to have nothing more to do with any member of that family."

"William, you are speaking hastily. The Morgans are invited everywhere, and when our children meet them, as they must, unless they stay closely at home, they will be obliged to treat them politely. You have never before interfered in their plans; why do you now?"

"I presume it is because I cannot be blind to the fact that my children do not compare favorably with my brother's children. I had not supposed there could be so great a difference in young people of the same age. I never in my life opened my eyes to a more unpleasant fact. Since forced to acknowledge it, I have tried to find a reason, and have decided that it lies partially in my children's associates, partially in the shallowness of the life we are allowing them to lead."

"Father, in what way am I different from Ned?" asked Rob. "I know I am different; but in what way?"

"If you have found out for yourself that there is a difference, my son, there is good reason to suppose that you will soon discover in what way."

Mr. Conway went out of the house, leaving his wife and children sitting in silent astonishment. They had never before been so severely criticized by him.

“Well!” exclaimed Zana, who was first to break the unpleasant silence, “it is intensely gratifying to have a father who loves his children as we are loved.”

“Don’t mind what he has said!” replied Mrs. Conway. “I presume he is troubled with an attack of indigestion, and will feel better in a few days. Regarding the Morgans, it will be wiser to say nothing more about them, until I have time to talk with your father alone. You will be obliged to meet them, of course; but there is really no reason why you should treat them with marked friendliness.”

Rob made no response, but when, a few moments later, he joined Ned, who was packing his trunk, his face was unusually thoughtful.

“Well, old fellow!” he said, trying to speak with his accustomed cheerfulness, “this is pretty business, isn’t it?”

“Fine, sir, fine!” exclaimed Ned, from the depths of the trunk.

“I hate to have you go, Ned, but I suppose it is useless to try to persuade you——”

“Don’t try!” interrupted Ned, quickly. “I shouldn’t know what to say, and I don’t want to say it, anyhow!”

“It looks very much as if we had not tried to entertain——”

“ Bosh ! old man, must I choke you the last thing before leaving? What’s the matter with Robert Conway ? ”

“ He’s all right ! ” replied Rob, with true political enthusiasm. Both boys laughed, and the subject was dropped, as if by mutual consent.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON the morning of the fifth day of January, Mrs. Charles Conway was hurrying to get her work done before her husband came home to dinner. She was late about it, for she had watched with Mrs. Dayne all night, and had taken a little nap immediately after breakfast. She was dusting the piano, with her back turned toward the door, when she was startled almost out of her usual self-control by a gloved hand which suddenly covered her eyes.

“Mercy!” she exclaimed, struggling to pull the hand away.

“Guess who!” exclaimed a merry voice, and she felt herself pressed close against somebody’s shoulder.

“Take your hand from my eyes, Ned!” was her next exclamation. “I want to know why you are here.”

Ned released her, and the next moment she had one arm around him, the other around Grace, and was trying to tell them, between kisses, how glad she was to have them home again.

“I think you have needed us,” said Grace. “You look completely worn out. Why did you not send for me as soon as Mrs. Dayne was taken sick?”

“She was taken the day you left for Chicago, and

every day since then we have been hoping she would be better. She has wished to see you."

"Did Nellie Raleigh stay with her at night, as she promised?"

"Yes, and during the day as well, when she could. Nellie has done more than she promised you she would do. Mrs. Dayne seemed much better this morning. Now, my children, tell me why you came home so unexpectedly."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Grace, "you can't think how good it seems to be with some one to whom I am sure I ought to tell it."

"To whom you ought to tell everything, dear," replied Mrs. Conway, patting her daughter's cheek.

Mrs. Conway seated herself on the sofa, and drew her children to seats on either side of her, that she might hold a hand of each while she talked with them; then Grace told her of the incidents of the visit in the city, with frequent interruptions from Ned. The recital was hardly completed, when Mr. Conway's step was heard on the porch.

"There comes papa!" exclaimed Grace, running to meet him.

"And dinner isn't ready," said Mrs. Conway.

"What's that about dinner?" asked Mr. Conway from the hall. "I am nearly starved."

"It isn't ready, papa!" said Grace, throwing both arms around her father's neck.

"What in time does this mean, you little witch?"

"It means that I am at home again; what do you

suppose ? What have you to say about it anyhow ? ”

“ I thought we were rid of you for a month,” he replied, trying to look annoyed. After giving his daughter what he termed a good old-fashioned bear hug, he turned to Ned, to whom he spoke in as stern a voice as he could command. “ Young man,” he said, “ give an account of yourself, if you please ! ” And then he forgot all about trying to be dignified or annoyed or stern or anything else except very glad to have his children with him, and kissed his big boy quite as tenderly as he could have done when he was a baby.

“ Isn’t it nice to have them back again ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Conway, with a smile that was half fears. “ You can’t think how we have missed you, my children.”

“ We will not spend time thinking of it now, Marie,” replied Mr. Conway, “ but in being thankful that we are all together again.”

“ Oh, dear, the dinner ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Conway, in sudden dismay.

“ What is the trouble with it ? ” asked her husband.

“ It isn’t cooked ! I was late with my work, and when the children came——”

“ I understand. Can’t we get a lunch for ourselves ? Come, children, let us see what we can find. Your mother has been working entirely too hard of late.”

“ You don’t take as good care of her as we do,” replied Ned, saucily.

The family marched to the dining-room, where Mrs. Conway straightened the table-cloth, while Mr. Conway and his children went in search of something to eat, returning with such a variety that Mrs. Conway declared it could never be arranged to look at all tempting.

"Give it up?" asked Ned. "Then I'll fix it in fine style!"

Ned had been quite successful in his search for doughnuts and cranberry jelly, a combination which he declared to be food fit for the finest king that ever sat on a throne, and now he proceeded to arrange the table with all his favorite dishes within easy reach of his own plate.

What a happy family it was that gathered around that table! Grace and Ned thought of their experience of the last few days, and knew that they realized, as they never had before, how much cause for thankfulness they had. "In all the world," they thought, "there is nothing so desirable as a pleasant home;" and they silently resolved to try harder than ever before to contribute their share to the home happiness.

"How is it, my son?" said Mr. Conway, when he had been told the cause of his children's unexpected return. "Do you feel as if you had seen enough of city life?"

"I have seen little of it, I presume, sir," replied Ned, "but I have had quite enough of the kind of life my cousins led while we were there."

"Then you want to go back again?"

"Some day, perhaps, under more favorable cir-

cumstances. It would be fine fun to go with you and mother ! I don't believe we saw the best of city life, but only a miserable little portion of it, which is not worth striving for."

"And, papa," added Grace, "they strive, and worry, and make one another and themselves just as uncomfortable as you can imagine ! I should hate to be obliged to spend all my life so foolishly."

"Mother," asked Ned, suddenly, "did you ever dance ?"

"Yes, my son."

"Why did you never tell me about it ?" demanded Grace.

"It is something of which I am not very proud," replied Mrs. Conway, with a smile.

"Why didn't you tell me that, then ?"

"It was forgotten, until one day I heard you wishing that you might have such pleasures as your cousins enjoyed. I should have told you, then, how little pleasure such things had afforded me, but you were in no mood to receive such information as I should have wished. I think you would have felt that I had forgotten the longings of a girl, and that you would prefer to gain some experience for yourself."

"Well, mamma, I've had it. I would not exchange places with Zana for anything in the world."

Before the family had finished their dinner, a messenger came with word that Mrs. Dayne was worse and wished to see Mrs. Conway.

"Let me go," pleaded Grace. "I've had a little

experience as nurse since I left home, and I am sure I can take care of Mrs. Dayne. You need rest."

"You may go with me, daughter, and if Mrs. Dayne is not very much worse I will leave you there, and come home again. Poor woman! She needs a trained nurse. I wish we could afford to hire one for her for a few days; but our expenses have been heavy this year."

"How much—" began Ned, then stopped abruptly, remembering that his money had been lent to Grace, and that the generous impulse which prompted the question must be put aside. The brother and sister exchanged glances. Ned smiled, but Grace thought of the pink fan, gloves, slippers, etc., and her eyes filled with tears.

"What a wicked waste of money!" she thought; "and it would be such a help to mamma as well as Mrs. Dayne, if we only had it now."

Mrs. Dayne was much worse, and, after a brief consultation, a telegram was sent to Helen to come home at once.

"Will she die?" asked Grace, with quivering lips.

"We hope not," replied the doctor, "but she is very sick. You may go in, now, to see her, if you think you can control yourself. She must not know how sick she is, or that we have sent for Helen."

Mrs. Dayne was very glad to see Grace, and welcomed her warmly. "It is almost as good as having Helen here," she said.

"Then you will let me stay and take care of you,

won't you?" asked Grace, coaxingly. "Mamma thinks I do not know enough, but I am sure I can obey the doctor's orders to the letter."

"I'll trust you, my dear," replied Mrs. Dayne, "and I shall be happier than I can tell to have you with me. Your sunshiny face is worth more than a great many bottles of medicine."

"Thanks!" exclaimed the doctor, with a smile. "I will give you some bitter medicine to pay for that, my lady! No, on second thought, I will forgive you, for you are not the only one who is glad to have Grace home again."

"It is nice of you to say so," replied Grace, "but I don't know why you should. I wonder if all doctors flatter girls whom they have known from babyhood?"

Grace was well aware that she was not blessed with the talent she admired in others; but she was quite blind to the fact that she possessed one of the greatest of talents—the ability to help and comfort, and give happiness to others. She sometimes longed to be a great musician, and did not know that few days passed in which there was no record of some tired heart where she had set the sweetest music ringing. Sometimes she had almost envied Helen her talent for drawing, and once, after hearing Zana sing, she had complained, half laughing, half in earnest, because she had been born without a hint of genius in any direction.

"Why should you wish to be a greater somebody than you are," asked Ned. "You could not rule your family and friends any more tyrannically than

you do now, if you were the greatest artist that ever lived!"

Ned's words were commonplace and lightly spoken, but there was no one who knew Grace but understood and indorsed all that they implied.

CHAPTER XX.

GRACE did not leave Mrs. Dayne again, except when her mother came and insisted on her taking needed rest. She wanted to fill the place of the trained nurse, who could not be hired because Ned's money had been spent foolishly. She also wished to take Helen's place, in so far as that was possible, not only because of her friendship for Helen, but because she loved Mrs. Dayne. She was a nurse by nature, as Aunt Sara had discovered, and she succeeded so well in her attempt, that Mrs. Dayne could not bear to have her leave the room. She did not find the task she had set for herself an easy one, by any means, but no one could have found fault with the way she performed it. One night Mrs. Dayne awakened suddenly from a light sleep, and held out her hand to Grace.

"You are tired, dear, aren't you?" she asked.

"Not very," replied Grace. "You have had a nice nap, Mrs. Dayne; can you not take another?"

"What time is it, Grace?"

"Half-past three; it will soon be morning. Try to go to sleep again. Shall I rub your head?"

"Grace, I wish you would send for Helen."

"Not on my account, Mrs. Dayne," replied Grace, quickly, thinking her patient was worrying, as she

usually did when she feared she was causing trouble to another. "I am really not very tired."

"Not on your account, dear, for I shall not need care long, but on Helen's. I am not going to get well."

"Sick people always have that thought, do they not?"

Grace smiled as she asked the question; but her heart grew very heavy.

"Will you not send a telegram as early as possible in the morning? If Helen does not come very soon, she will not find me here. I know it, Grace."

There was a solemnity in Mrs. Dayne's voice and in her eyes that went straight to Grace's heart. She reminded herself of her duties as a nurse, and tried to appear as she had read that a nurse should, when her patient was given to melancholy questions; but in vain. Her love for Helen and her mother made it quite impossible for her to control her feelings, and, burying her face in Mrs. Dayne's pillow, she burst into tears.

"Oh, don't say that, Mrs. Dayne," she sobbed. "You must get well! Think of poor Helen!"

"Dear, I have thought of nothing else for days and days. That is why I want to see her before I go."

"She is coming, Mrs. Dayne. She may be here to-morrow."

"Coming! Then you have known——"

"The doctor thought she might better be sent for," Grace interrupted, "but he still hopes to see

you well. He said you were ever so much better last night."

"I do have less pain. I am so glad Helen is coming! Perhaps I shall not suffer as I have during the rest of my stay here, and Helen and I can enjoy our last talks together."

"Oh, Mrs. Dayne, please don't!" Grace's eyes were overflowing again.

"My child, I wish you would not take it so. Think of me as going on a little journey, which you will take one day, and let us talk about it as if we were to meet again very soon."

"I can't! It is too dreadful! You must get well; you really must, and you never can if you allow yourself to be so despondent. Think of Helen—how much she needs you—and resolve to live for her sake. I have heard mother tell of people who have become well when the doctors had given them up, simply because they would not die."

"I want to die, my dear. Helen does not need me very much now. She will miss me, I know; but there is no way in which I can be of great assistance to her, and I long for rest. Helen will understand, for she knows, as no one else does, how hard life has been for me since her father died."

"It will be easier, soon. Helen will be in a position to help you."

"I am glad she decided to become an engraver, but she has a harder battle before her than you think. It will be easier without me. I have taught her all I know of life, and could not give her more help in that way, and I long to go."

"Oh, Mrs. Dayne, it would break Helen's heart to hear you talk like this."

"She will understand, dear; Helen and I always understand each other. She will miss me, but she will be glad that I am once more with her dear father. Grace, you cannot think how hard life has been since he died. It will seem so good to be at rest."

As Mrs. Dayne talked, Grace found herself growing quieter. She had always had a dread of death, and put the thought of it away from her whenever possible; now she listened to Mrs. Dayne with a wonder from which all awe was fast disappearing. They talked together very freely from that hour, and Grace realized more and more keenly how brave a battle had been fought by the delicate woman in her effort to live without assistance and educate her child. She also realized that much of the bitterness which had fallen heavily upon the shrinking nature, had been dealt out by women.

"Just such women as Aunt Eveline!" thought Grace, recalling the scene with the hired woman who had made her party dress. "Just such a woman as I will never be!" she added, passionately. Then followed one of her customary little talks with her Heavenly Father.

"Dear Father in Heaven," she whispered, "if ever I deal thoughtlessly with one of your poor children who must work against such terrible odds, I pray Thee send me a swift punishment, that will make me remember the vow I have taken tonight."

Ned went to the depot to meet Helen.

“How is mother?” was the first question asked by the poor child so soon to be orphaned.

“Better, I think,” replied Ned, cheerfully. “She has rested much easier during the last thirty-six hours. Come in here, Helen,” leading the way to a drug store; “I want to get you a glass of hot beef-tea.”

“No, thanks, Ned. Really, I cannot eat a mouthful.”

“I don’t ask you to eat,” Ned replied, taking Helen’s arm, “but it won’t hurt you to drink a little beef-tea. You have had a long ride, and must take some nourishment before you walk another step. You know what it means when I say must.”

Ned had his way, as he usually did when determined.

“Grace is with mother, I suppose?” asked Helen, while waiting for the beef-tea.

“She has been there night and day since we returned from the city.”

“I knew it! She is the best friend a girl ever had.”

“And the best sister in the world!” added Ned.

They walked in silence the rest of the way to Helen’s home. Ned knew that Helen’s mind must be busy with thoughts of her mother, and he was too thoughtful to make her talk on that, or other subjects. When they reached her door, he said:

“You know how glad I shall be to have you tell me when you wish anything done.”

“I know, Ned. Thank you. There is no one but your family whom I could tell.”

Ned raised his hat, and turned away, and, at that moment, Grace opened the door for Helen.

“She is better, dear, and waiting to see you!” was Grace’s greeting. Then she quickly removed Helen’s hat and bathed her face with a handkerchief, dipped in cologne.

Helen went alone to her mother’s room, and, for more than an hour, no one was admitted; then she came back into the room where Grace was sitting. Her eyes showed traces of recent tears, but her voice was as calm as it had always been.

“Mother is sleeping,” she said. “Grace dear, are you very tired?”

“No, Helen; why?”

“I was wondering if you would stay with me until——” Helen’s voice broke, and she could not finish the sentence.

“I was wondering if you would let me stay,” replied Grace, quickly. “I do not want to leave you, Helen.”

“You are a good friend!” said Helen, simply.

“Helen, I wish I could tell you how sorry I am.”

“I know; please don’t talk to me like that, or I shall lose what little self-control I have. I must not spoil these last days with my mother by selfish sorrowing.”

“I don’t see how you can bear it as you do! You seem ever so much older and wiser than I. If it were my mother, I think I should die, too!”

“Grace, you don’t know what it would be to you to see your mother obliged to work far beyond her strength, day after day, at an occupation which

brought her continual insults from women who are not worthy to tie her shoe! And to know that the insults must be borne quietly, else the work, which means bread and butter, would be withheld. You can never know one-half the unnecessary burdens my mother has been made to carry by the thoughtlessness of the women who employed her. It seems to me, sometimes, that I shall never be able to forgive them."

Helen was pacing the floor, her strong, beautiful face alive with the intense emotion which was kept from her voice by her wonderful self-control. Grace had always known that her friend was different from other girls, but never understood the reason why until now. Her love for her own mother made it easy for her to understand how Helen had suffered in seeing her mother suffer.

"I hate them, to-day," Helen said, and the words sounded curiously in the unnatural evenness of tone in which they were spoken.

"I have not realized how good she is, until these last few days," said Grace, thoughtfully, "although I have always loved her. I can't feel reconciled to the thought that she must leave us, and just when you are getting able to make life easier for her."

"Grace, mother is tired in a way that could not find rest in the easiest life on earth. The joy of living has all been taken away from her by the hard experiences of the last few years. She is beyond everything this life has to offer, and has been for a long time. It is something as it is with one who is ready for a ride, and the carriage is late; no matter

how comfortable she might be; she would have the feeling of expectancy and of impatience to be going, which would prevent her from enjoying her surroundings. When I cry because my mother is going away from me it is a selfish sorrow. Grace, it must not be indulged ! Help me to be courageous ! ”

“ I will do what I can,” replied Grace, and then the two friends went back to the sick-room.

During the days that followed, the three talked together very much as three friends would if one of them were about to start on a long earthly journey, and Grace felt herself lifted into an atmosphere so far above that of her uncle’s home, that the scenes through which she passed while there seemed far away, and as if participated in by some other girl than herself. She knew that those quiet hours in the sick-room, and the long, earnest talks, and the strange, new thoughts that had come to her during the last few days were helping to fit her for a broader life than she could find in the giddy whirl of what is known as fashionable society.

Early one morning, Mrs. Dayne startled the girls by suddenly exclaiming, “ Helen, good-bye, dear ; I am going ! ”

“ Not yet, mother ! ” Helen quickly raised her mother’s head to her shoulder, and began to kiss the pale cheek. “ Oh, not yet ! I am not ready—— ”

“ Dear little girl, it is all right—everything is all right ! I see—oh, Helen, your father ! I am glad—very, very glad ! ” A little sigh, a happy smile, and all was over.

Mrs. Dayne had seemed better than usual during

the night, and the girls had hoped that she might be spared to them for some time. Not an hour before her death she had said that she felt almost as if she might be well again.

“Oh, Mrs. Dayne,” Grace had answered, “how happy we should be !”

“It would not please me, dear,” was the reply. “Don’t wish it.”

A few moments later, when she and Grace were alone together, she said softly, “I have wondered, Grace, if you and your mother are as near together as Helen and I have always been. Our close companionship has been the greatest comfort of my life, and when I am gone Helen will not have to reproach herself with the thought that she might have done one thing more than she did to add to my happiness.”

Now, with that still form lying before them, Grace repeated this to Helen, and it comforted the sorrowing girl as nothing else could.

As soon as possible, Helen returned to her studies in New York city. It seemed to her, as it did to her friends, that it would be better for her to go to work again. Before her mother died, it had been decided that Helen should henceforth make her home with the Conways. Mr. Conway was appointed her guardian, and had been instructed by Mrs. Dayne to sell the home and use the proceeds towards paying Helen’s expenses at the art school.

“If there is not enough to give her what knowledge she needs in her chosen work,” the mother had said, “I should be glad if you could lend her money. You may rest assured that she will pay

back every cent. I have talked with her about her work, and her knowledge of my strong desire that she should rise above mediocrity in it will overcome any feeling she may have against becoming your debtor."

And so the next few years of Helen's life were marked out for her, and we can leave her for the present, feeling sure that she will live them worthily.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEARLY three weeks had passed since Grace's return from Chicago, and during that time she had hardly given Zana a thought. Her life in the sick room, with its uplifting influences, made it quite impossible for her to see her experience of the city life in the light of reality. This was real; that seemed a fantastic play arranged for an hour's amusement, but not worth a second thought. But, when Helen's mother needed her care no longer, when Helen was gone, and nothing remained to take her attention, but the every-day duties and pleasures of her life at home, then she began again to think of Zana. She wondered why she had not written, feared that all was not well with her, accused herself of having shirked a duty by not telling her uncle of her suspicions, and in various ways made herself quite as uncomfortable as she had been in the city. Grace always found something in herself to condemn, but on this occasion her accusations were so numerous that there is no predicting what they might have driven her to do, had she not received a letter from Zana.

"DEAR GRACE," she read, "Papa is going to write to Uncle Charles to ask him to board Rob and

me for a little while. Rob is wild with delight, as you will probably guess, and I, too, should be pleased if I could only know that you would be glad to see me. I did not treat you well when you were here, and I should not blame you for never wanting to see me again. Papa does not intend to tell Uncle Charles why he wishes us to go to Oakwood ; he will state, simply, that he thinks the surroundings there will be better for us for the next year. That is the truth, but only a part of it. Now, I will tell you the rest. I became engaged to Harry Morgan just before we went to Oakwood. I did not intend to marry him, but became engaged just for fun, as a great many of my friends have done. I said nothing about it at the time, for I really never expected to marry him, and I did not tell you, because I always found it hard to talk with you about such things ; and then, I knew that you always tell your mother everything, and I did not care to have her know that. Harry wrote to me while I was at your house, and I found it interesting to receive and answer his letters, without any one's knowledge. He writes nice letters, and somehow I got to thinking of him as being quite different from what I really knew him to be, and I liked him better when I came back home than I did when I went away. I did not see much of him before our party, as you know ; perhaps it would have been better had I seen him oftener. You remember how hard we worked to get ready for the party, and how much annoyance I suffered on account of our lack of money. Every hour in the day something would happen which

would make me think how much easier my life would be should I marry into a rich family, and then I would think of Harry's nice letters, and especially of the passages in them where he had written of the fine times I would have as his wife. I think that, from the first, he was in earnest about the engagement. He knew that his father would be angry to have him marry me, for Mr. Morgan wishes both his children to marry into families wealthier than his. He also knew that my father did not like him, but he thought everything would end all right when we were married, and he made me think so too. The note you saw him give me was to acquaint me with the arrangements he had made for our elopement a week later. I told you the truth about that conversation you overheard, except that I did not tell what else was said. When you left us I had fully determined to run away with Harry, and that is why I did not urge you to stay. I knew it would be very unpleasant for you to be here during the disturbance my action would cause. Harry's plans were not carried out as he expected, and we did not get away as soon as he hoped we would. Grace, he forged my father's name in order to raise the money which was to pay our wedding expenses. He intended to forge his own father's name, but for some reason did not find an opportunity. Of course, I was ignorant of all this. Father discovered the forgery on the very day we intended leaving, and gave the matter into the hands of a detective with instructions to find the guilty party. The Morgans had their party that night and I went without father's per-

mission, but Rob remained at home. I was glad, thinking myself in less danger of discovery, for we meant to leave that night for Wisconsin. Grace, Harry was arrested at one o'clock in the morning, just as we were getting on the train. Can you imagine what I have suffered? If so, you will think that my punishment has been hard enough to bear. I shall never forget it. We were taken to my father at once, and Mr. Morgan was sent for. I had packed my satchel and given it to Harry that afternoon, and I had it in my hand when the detective brought us before my father. If I had not been with him, Harry would have been taken to police headquarters at once, but papa concluded to keep the matter as quiet as possible, on my account. I think my father will never forgive me. He does not scold, nor has he said one word about it since that night, but he looks so sorry that he makes me hate myself, and I run to my room whenever I see him coming. I did not believe I could ever hate any one as I now hate Harry Morgan. Lelia told some of the girls that we tried to elope and were caught and brought home, and, although no one knows of the dreadful thing Harry did, I feel as if I should like to die whenever I hear my name mentioned in connection with his. Oh, Grace, just think what life would have been to me had we been married before I discovered what I know now! I wish I had been brought up like you, to be more a child and less a fine young lady. It seems to me now as if I should never be happy again. For how can one be happy who has been so foolish?

"Now, you know the whole story ; do you utterly despise me ? I presume it will be a long time before you can feel that I am to be trusted, but I mean to prove to you that, although I have been very, very foolish, I am not wholly bad.

"From your cousin
"ZANA."

The tears were running down Grace's cheeks when she finished reading the letter.

"Mamma," she said, "I have told you the first of it, and you must know the last. Please read this."

When Mr. Conway came home from his office, bringing the letter he had received from his brother, he found his wife and children planning how they might help Zana without humiliating her.

"Then you know what William has written ?" he asked.

By way of reply, Mrs. Conway handed him Zana's letter.

"I thought," he said, as he finished reading it, "that something of the sort had occurred. I never read a more heart-breaking letter than William's. I am very glad, my dear, that you have decided to let Rob and Zana come to us. If William's wife had been like mine, he would not have needed to send his children away from home."

"If William had been like Charles," responded Mrs. Conway, "he might, even then, have kept his children with him."

The same mail that carried a letter to Mr. William Conway, saying that Rob and Zana would be more



than welcome at Oakwood, carried to the shame-stricken girl in the city home, a very long and very tender missive full of assurances of Grace's love and her delight over the prospect of their long visit together.

"I wonder how long father intends to let us stay in Oakwood," said Rob to his mother.

"I don't know, I am sure; for the rest of the season, I hope. By another winter this unfortunate affair will have been forgotten, and Zana may be able to make a good match. She has done enough to ruin our good name, and ought to try her best to retrieve herself."

"Zana is not the only one to blame," said Rob.

"What is that?" asked his mother, quickly.

"Oh, nothing! I wish I could know how many, and which, of my possessions I ought to find room for in this trunk."

"What a saving it would have been if your father could have thought of this plan before we went to the trouble and expense of giving that party!"

"It makes me sick to hear the word party spoken!" exclaimed Rob in a tone of disgust. "I am glad we are going where we shall have something else to think about."

Three days later Rob and Zana were again admitted into the pleasantest home in the world, as the Conway family insisted on speaking of it.

"Oh, Aunt Marie!" sobbed Zana, hiding her face on her aunt's shoulder, "what must you think of me!"

"There are few of us, my dear, who have not at

some time in our lives, done something for which we must always be sorry. I think such remembrances may do more than anything else to help us turn our lives into paths of usefulness, if we will let them. You are too wise to let one act of folly spoil your life."

Mrs. Conway's gentle voice and sweet smile were very comforting to Zana. She had feared her aunt's disapproval, and dreaded a reprimand which she knew she deserved, but now she thought, "Aunt Marie believes in me! I will let her see that I am not entirely worthless, if I have appeared so."

Rob had crossed the room to join his aunt and Zana, and now stood with his arm thrown protectingly around his sister's shoulders.

"I told Zana you could help her," he said, "and that you would know that she was thoughtless—not any worse. The way father treated her made me angry! I know I ought not to speak so, but he always deals out approval or condemnation by the wholesale, without regard to the motive governing the action. I love my father, but I love Zana better, and I understand her better, too. I knew just as soon as I heard of it, that Zana was simply thoughtless. She has always been thoughtless, but I had not believed she would be carried away quite so completely."

"Zana has not had enough to think about," said Mrs. Conway.

"That is the trouble with both of us," replied Rob. We have had no responsibility, nothing that we were obliged to do, and nothing to think about except

society, and how to manage to put on more style than some of our friends. I think Oakwood fun and work has quite spoiled me for Chicago society and its ridiculous make-believes."

"You must remember, Rob," interrupted Mrs. Conway, gently, "that what you have been accustomed to is only a small part of city life. Underneath the froth there are many lives devoted to noble purposes."

"Well," replied Rob, laughingly, "for my part I would rather hunt in Oakwood for lives devoted to noble purposes."

"Your father writes that you and Zana are to be treated as my own children," said Mr. Conway; "otherwise we could not have taken you, because Grace and Ned cannot live simply to have a good time, as they do when entertaining guests."

"I'm willing to do anything you say, just to be allowed to stay here," replied Rob, who was in high spirits, principally because Zana was looking happier than she had been for several days.

"That is complimentary," said Mrs. Conway, with a smile.

"I'm jolly glad to be here, Aunt Mary. And now, sir," to his uncle, "what do you mean to do with us?"

"There is a young fellow reading law in my office, who has just graduated with high honors from one of the best colleges in the East. He came West because his health has not been very good of late, but he is a devoted student. I shall engage him to prepare Ned for college, and I wish you to share

Ned's studies while here. You will also share his duties——”

“Good! you've got to saw wood,” interrupted Ned, with a chuckle.

“I'll go home to-night,” groaned Rob, in mock despair.

“And clean the barn floor,” added Ned.

“Never, sir, never!”

“And take care of the horse, and make garden, and sweep walks, and care for father's office, and collect his bills, and——”

“What in time are you going to do?”

“Play gentleman! I've always wanted to show the world what a success I might be in that line.”

“You will not play gentleman with my assistance, young man, just let me tell you that! Uncle Charles, what is to be done with Zana?”

“Ask your aunt.”

“I am going to see that law student, also,” replied Mrs. Conway. “I want my girls to share their brothers' studies.”

“I see no reason why they should not,” said Mr. Conway. “But what about the housework? Are you to do more than you have been doing?”

“We will do it all, won't we, Zana,” said Grace.

“I don't know how to do much of it, but I'll do what I can,” replied Zana. “Don't you remember that cake I made?”

“Why will you persist in reminding us of unpleasant things?” asked Ned. “We'll find that, in the spring, just as it was when you threw it away.

The snow of more than one winter will be required to soften it."

"If you are to be my girl," continued Mrs. Conway, "I shall insist on your learning how to keep house, and I should also like to have you learn a trade."

"A trade! Why, Aunt Mary, do you think I am to earn my own living?"

"You may be obliged to do so some day."

"Is Grace to become self-supporting?"

"Not much!" interrupted Ned.

"We hope to keep Grace at home," replied Mr. Conway. "I do not believe in girls becoming bread-winners unless they are obliged to; they make life harder for more unfortunate girls. Besides, what is home without a daughter! Grace is one of the necessities of her mother's life and mine; we need her daily presence in our home."

"It will be wise for her to have some occupation to depend upon, should she need it," said Mrs. Conway, "or in case she should grow to think this home too small——"

"Mamma!" Grace raised her finger threateningly, "when I leave this home it will be when you send me away."

"Or when I do!" added Ned. "I may not be reckoned among the daily necessities, but I've come to stay, all the same."

"And to be heard," murmured Grace.

"By the way, Ned," said Rob, "how about the 'Oakwood Transcript?'"

"Come to the office, old chap, and find out for yourself. Come, girls!"

The young people flocked to the editorial office, and were soon deep in a discussion regarding some proposed changes which they thought of making in the arrangement of the departments in their paper. Rob was assistant manager, once more ; Zana, associate editor.

"From this time on," said Ned, "we must make our paper do more than pay expenses."

"I wish we might," sighed Grace. "I am so deep in debt ! It will take my entire allowance for the next four months to make me square with the world, and where is my spring wardrobe to come from ?"

"I can lend you a little money," said Zana, "for I have decided to buy nothing new until I have worn out what I have."

"Zana economical ! Is the world coming to an end ?" asked Rob, tragically. "Zana, me own dear loved one, is thy liver all right ? Tell me, sweetest tootsy-wootsy, that thou art not going to die. Tell me——oh, thunder !"

The last of Rob's remark was forced from his lips by the application of a quantity of editorial paste, which was applied by Grace. It was the beginning of a romp which caused Mr. Conway to look at Mrs. Conway and ask if he ought not to insure the house against cyclones.

"Let them romp," was the reply ; "the longer we can keep them children, the happier they will be."

A few weeks later, four heads were bent over a

large book in which were kept the accounts of the "Oakwood Transcript."

"It is the first time," said Ned, "that our paper has more than paid expenses. We have two dollars apiece, clear gain, and the prospect for next month is excellent!"

"Doesn't it seem funny, Rob, to think you and I are earning money?" asked Zana.

"It is downright satisfactory!" replied Rob.

"Helen's illustrations are a great help in securing advertising," said Ned, "and advertising is what pays. We must write a company letter of thanks to Helen."

"How much more enterprising our paper looks, with its illustrated advertisements, than that little affair published down town!" Zana found a great deal of satisfaction in speaking scornfully of the village paper, which the Conways chose to consider as a rival.

"Another lot of blocks from Helen arrived this morning," announced Grace. "Among them is a very pretty one that I should think the milliner would be delighted to use."

"I'll see her about it, to-day!" replied Ned, briskly. "I have tried twice to get her 'ad.' and failed both times; but I'll get it this time, if I have to camp in her pantry over night!"

"Now that we have our books in order," said Grace, "I wish you would help me straighten out the accounts of the V. I. A. I hate book-keeping."

"I don't," replied Zana; "it's fun. I am going

to take a course in book-keeping, if aunty will let me, then I can help papa when I go home. Pass the accounts this way, Grace."

"While Zana is adding up those marks you call figures," said Rob to Grace, "suppose you listen to this."

Taking a paper from his desk, Rob read as follows :

"It has been a long time, dear fellow-citizens, since you have had the privilege of attending one of the fine entertainments given by the V. I. A. As was to be expected, such deprivation has left its mark upon you. You have grown sad-eyed, morbid, languid, dyspeptic ; you need bracing up. The entertainment to be given by the V. I. A. next Wednesday night can brace you up, if you will allow it to, as you have never before been braced. When these entertainments were postponed, no one dreamed that so long a time would elapse before they were again resumed ; such a dream would have been called a nightmare ! But, as has been proven, old Father Time had this unpleasantness in store for us. It has come and gone, and we have lived through it. Now, should we not show our gratitude for so merciful an extension of life by appearing in full force at that wonderful, health-giving entertainment, the 'Conundrum social, and great American What-is-it ?' I will not refer to the object to be gained by the series of entertainments to be given between this and spring, but let your natural desire for health and long life help you to decide in our favor."

"Now, Grace, listen to this," said Ned, when Rob had finished reading. "You, as editor-in-chief,

must decide which of these articles shall appear in our paper."

Ned pulled his manuscript from his pocket, and read: "We call the attention of our readers to the fact that it is the 'Oakwood Transcript,' and not that little down-town sheet, which is not yet large enough to know its own name, it is the enterprising, progressive, fifty-cent-a-year 'Oakwood Transcript,' which brings the first news of the entertainment to be given by the V. I. A. next Wednesday night. The writer wrote a descriptive adjective before the word entertainment, but with his usual power of fine discernment, quite wonderful in one so young, he decided that were all the glowing adjectives in the dictionary to be used, they could not adequately describe an event of such magnitude, and the intruding word was erased. Reader, you must see this entertainment for yourself. Admission only twenty-five cents. Maiden ladies, over forty years of age, half price; bachelors, over forty, seventy-five cents. We do not wish to threaten, but think it only fair to state that there is talk of publishing, under the title 'Unpatriotic Citizens,' the names of all who do not buy tickets to at least three of the entertainments given by the V. I. A. between this and spring. At the close of the entertainment next Wednesday night, the executive committee of the V. I. A. will discuss the question, 'Shall the money to be earned by these entertainments be spent in improving the park, or in paving Main Street?' The adults may listen to the discussion, but must remember that the time has now arrived when adults must be seen and not heard."

Ned folded his paper, and looked at Grace expectantly. "Which one?" he asked.

"Neither," she replied. "I can write a better article, myself."

"Rob, it is very plain to me that there is soon to be a struggle in this office between the editors and managers. Right must prevail——"

"Right will prevail," interrupted Grace, "and those manuscripts will both go into the waste basket. They lack dignity. If we expect to make our paper pay, we must try to give our readers something worth reading."

"How mercenary Grace is!" in an aside to Ned. "She thinks only of making something pay."

"I presume she will behave in this unseemly manner until she is out of debt," replied Ned. "If we expect to have any fun, I presume we shall have to pay her debts first!"

"Boys, my debts do not make one bit of difference. We are going to do our best to get out a good paper. I think papa will not be pleased unless we do. Besides, I think of becoming a journalist in earnest, some day, and wish, now, to do the best I can."

"The most successful journalist is the one who writes bright articles," replied Rob.

"A bright article does not need to be undignified," retorted Grace.

"You have made us desperate," said Ned, "and desperate men take desperate measures. The advertising space in this paper is under the control of your noble brother. No one can say me nay, should I conclude to leave out some of the advertis-

ing and insert both Rob's article and mine in the next issue of our paper."

"Let's do it, Ned!" exclaimed Rob. "It will give us fine positions for advertising right next to our articles, and we can charge enough extra to make up for the space we use."

It began to look as if the boys had the best of it, and Grace concluded to say no more, but to consult with Zana when they were alone, and contrive some plan for outwitting their brothers.

That night, as the girls were getting ready for bed, Grace said, "Are you homesick, Zana dear?"

"Homesick! No, indeed. What put that thought into your head?"

"You have been very quiet to-day."

"I have been thinking."

"What about?"

"Oh, many things! I have been wondering why people are different—some good, others bad—and how much of the goodness depends upon one's surroundings, and whether every one should be considered equally to blame for doing the same thing, and—"

"Zana, what a little goose you are! I wouldn't worry about that—that episode, another minute."

"Are you sure you would not?"

"Sure I should try not to, at any rate. What good does it do? It is very much like crying over spilt milk. It is wiser to go to work to repair the damage as nearly as possible, and take care not to spill the milk again."

"You don't know how I wish I had had more sense."

"I can guess, I think. Don't you remember what Rob said: 'Zana has plenty of common-sense, but it is not of the precocious variety. It takes a long time to get started.' Rob loves you more every day!"

"It is strange, isn't it, that my folly should bring Rob and me nearer together? He has been very good to me. I wonder if I should have been as good to him? I mean to try to be a companion to him, as you are to Ned, more especially when we go home from here, where things are not so pleasant."

"You are not going very soon, young lady! Papa says Uncle William has made arrangements for you to remain with us for a year, and we are so glad to have you here, that we shall not let you go any sooner than we must."

"I want to stay until I have learned how to make a pleasant home; then I shall go back and let papa see that his daughter may also be 'a daily necessity,' to quote Ned."

"Are you going to do the housework?"

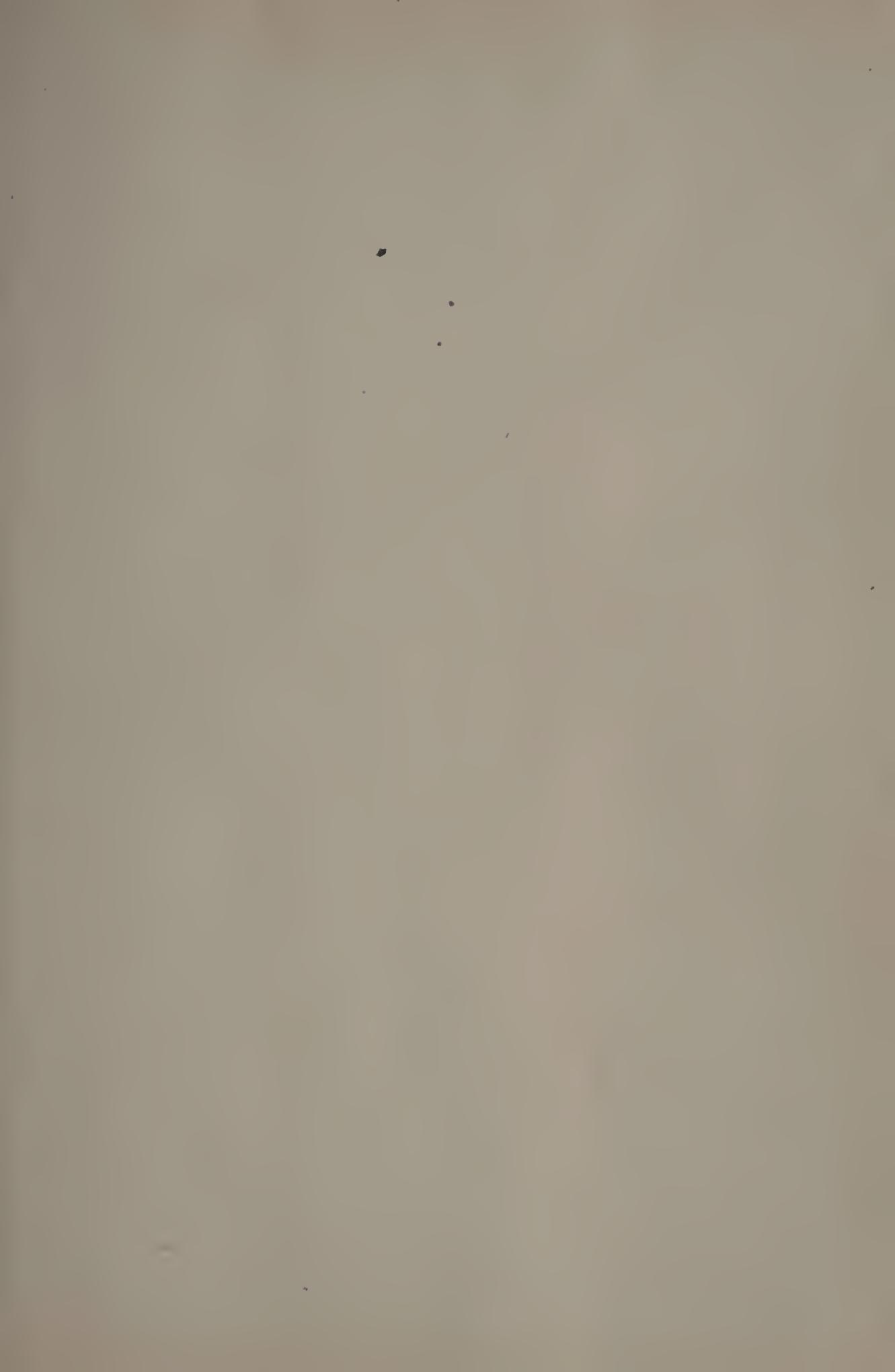
"I do not expect to, of course, but if I know how it should be done, I may be able to see that things are run a little more economically. I have been thinking that I have made life very hard for papa, sometimes, regarding money matters."

"But if you are to be married by the time you are seventeen——" began Grace, mischievously.

"Make it twenty-seven!" interrupted Zana.

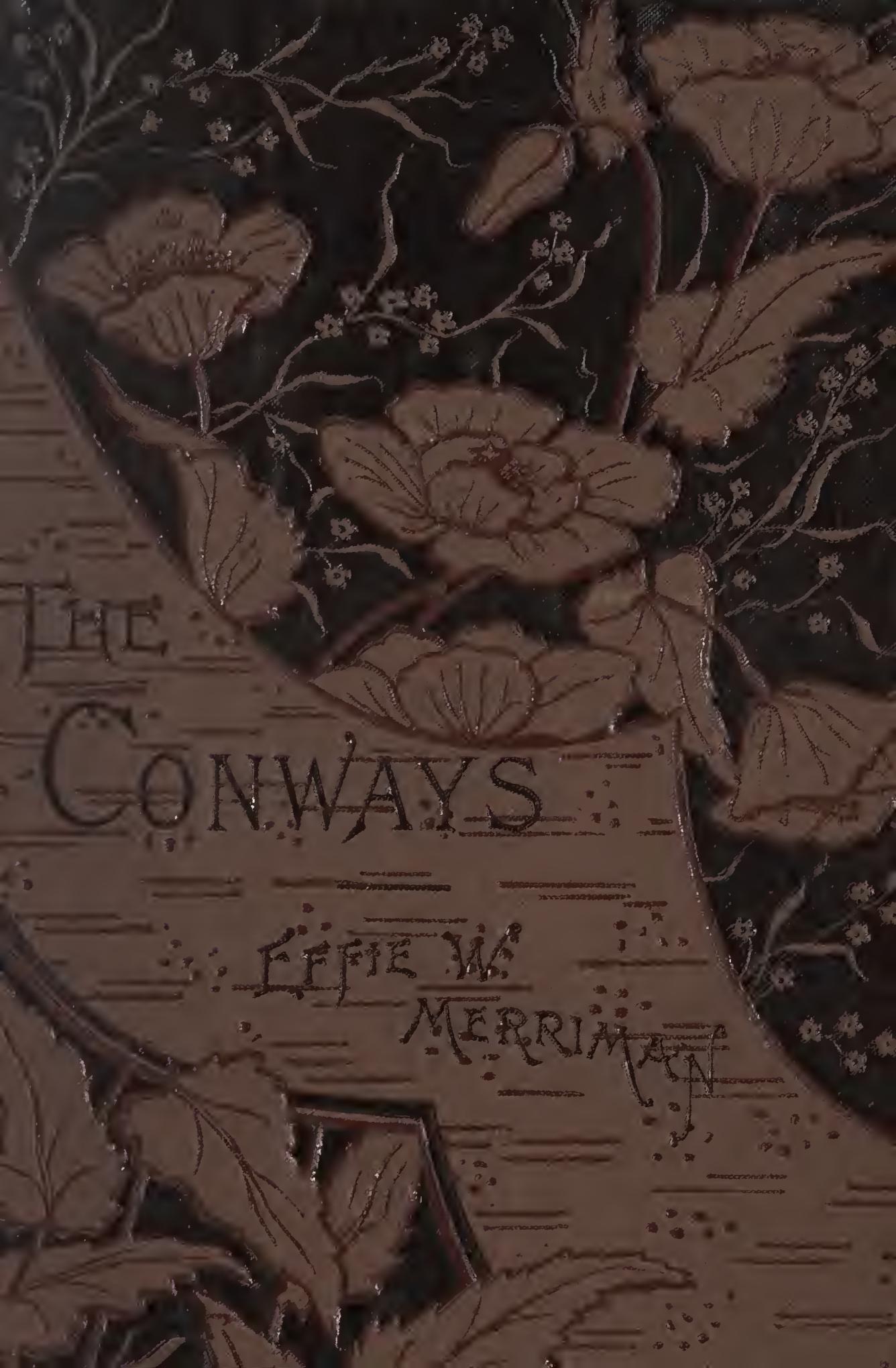
Zana had reached the conclusion which, by the way, is shared by the writer, that a girl of sixteen should have nothing to do with lovers, or any of the nonsense in which society young ladies indulge.

THE END.



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